

OXFORD

THE ART OF SOLIDARITY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Guilds in England 1250–1550



GERVASE ROSSER



VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

THE ART OF SOLIDARITY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages

Guilds in England 1250–1550

GERVASE ROSSER

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

© Gervase Rosser 2015

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

First Edition published in 2015

Impression: 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the
prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted
by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics
rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the
above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the
address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014948843

ISBN 978-0-19-820157-1

Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Links to third party websites are provided by Oxford in good faith and
for information only. Oxford disclaims any responsibility for the materials
contained in any third party website referenced in this work.

for Jane

Acknowledgements

This book was first conceived a long time ago, and I must begin by thanking my editors at Oxford University Press—originally Robert Faber, latterly Stephanie Ireland—for their willingness to take the long view. Both have been loyal friends to the project, and I am also indebted to Cathryn Steele for overseeing the book's production. To the organizers of seminars and conferences in London, Paris, Trier, Antwerp, Ghent, Louvain-la-Neuve, and elsewhere, I am grateful for opportunities to develop the initial ideas which are more fully evolved and integrated in this book. A growing awareness of and interest in the medieval European guilds, over the past two decades, has yielded a wealth of published case-studies to which any contributor to the field is glad to acknowledge an enormous debt. The current mantra, where research funding is concerned, of 'collaborative research' sometimes distracts from the fact that all research is necessarily a collaborative process. In the context of a book about solidarity, it is a particular pleasure to express gratitude for the sense of participation in a larger culture, materially under-resourced yet intellectually generous, of historical scholarship. Of the friends whose conversation and advice have helped to shape the ideas put forward in the book, I thank especially Caroline Barron, David D'Avray, Chris Dyer, Élodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, Monika Escher-Apsner, Alfred Haverkamp, the late Rodney Hilton, Derek Keene, Matthew Kempshall, Jörn Leonhard, Maarten Prak, Susan Reynolds, Rosa Sidoti, Jean-Pierre Sosson, Peter Stabler, Elspeth Veale, and Chris Wickham. I have learned much from my students, and in particular from three former doctoral students in medieval history, Matthew Davies, Patrick Lantschner, and Hannah Skoda.

Research of the kind on which this book is based would be impossible without the assistance of librarians and archivists both in national and in diverse provincial collections: my gratitude for their assistance is heartfelt. For their generosity in providing images, I am profoundly grateful to Kate Giles, Richard Marks, and Christian Riddy. I thank St Catherine's College and the History Faculty of Oxford University for periods of research leave. To colleagues and students in the History Faculty, the Department of Art History, and St Catherine's College in Oxford, I owe an intellectual environment which I appreciate daily. Even more than to any of these, however, the ideas which I have attempted to set out in this book are indebted to my fellow historian, Jane Garnett: my wife, constant inspiration, and best friend.

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xi
1. Immunity	1
2. Ethics	37
3. Friendship	89
4. Sacrament	119
5. Trust	149
6. Community	187
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	229
<i>Index</i>	233

List of Illustrations

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. The founders, brothers, and sisters of the Holy Trinity guild, Luton, in the late fifteenth-century guild register. Luton Museum. Photo: Richard Marks. | xiv |
| 2. Almshouses, hall, and chapel of the guild of the Holy Cross, Stratford-upon-Avon, early fifteenth century. Photo: Malcolm Davies
© Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. | 36 |
| 3. Communal drinking-horn (auroch's horn), early fourteenth century with seventeenth-century additions. Probably once of the Cambridge guild of Corpus Christi. Photo: With kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. | 88 |
| 4. A feast of the Ludlow palmers' guild. Fifteenth-century window in the guild chapel, parish church of St Lawrence, Ludlow. Photo: Christian Liddy. | 118 |
| 5. Tapestry of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in St Mary's Guildhall, Coventry, late fifteenth century. (The figure of Justice in the upper centre is a sixteenth-century replacement.) Photo: Christian Liddy. | 133 |
| 6. Merchant Adventurers' Hall, York. Built in 1357–61 for the fraternity of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. Used from 1430 by the mercers. View of main hall interior towards the dais end. Photo: Kate Giles. | 148 |
| 7. Culham Bridge, Abingdon, built by the guild of the Holy Cross from 1416. Photo: Author. | 186 |
| 8. Fayrey Pall or hearse-cloth, showing members of the fraternity of St John the Baptist, Dunstable, with their patron saint, c.1500. Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum, London, with kind permission of Richard Andrews, Rector of Dunstable. | 214 |

True self-love and social are the same.

Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*

Albion reply'd: 'Cannot Man exist without Mysterious
Offering of Self for Another? is this Friendship & Brotherhood? . . .'
Jesus said: 'Wouldest thou love one who never died
For thee, or ever die for one who had not died for thee?
And if God dieth not for Man & giveth not himself
Eternally for Man, Man could not exist; for Man is Love
As God is Love; every kindness to another is a little Death
In the Divine Image, nor can Man exist but by Brotherhood.'

William Blake, 'Jerusalem'



Fig. 1 The founders, brothers, and sisters of the Holy Trinity guild, Luton, in the late fifteenth-century guild register. Luton Museum. Photo: Richard Marks.

1

Immunity

None of us is individually self-sufficient,
but each has many needs he cannot satisfy.

Plato, *Republic*¹

HUMAN FRAILTY

This observation attributed to Socrates in Plato's dialogue has been echoed many times. It is a compelling view: a solitary human being is, indeed, a pathetically helpless creature. The sheer feebleness and lack of naturally endowed specialized skills of the human animal has moved philosophers to suggest that a human being, precisely because so poorly adapted for survival, has necessarily to develop an exceptional degree of extroversion and versatility in their interaction with the surrounding world. Jean-Jacques Rousseau expressed with cold clarity the perception that what truly united men was their lack of self-sufficiency:

Men are not naturally kings, or lords, or courtiers, or rich men. All are born naked and poor; all are subject to the miseries of life, to sorrows, ills, needs, and pains of every kind. Finally, all are condemned to death. This is what truly belongs to man. This is what no mortal is exempt from.²

Johann Gottfried Herder a few years later echoed the thought that survival in the case of the human being could not be complacently regarded—as it could in the case of other animals—as a given outcome of her or his integration with nature. On the contrary, a human life, vulnerable both in its weak connection to its ecological environment and in its tendency to destructive violence,

¹ Plato, *Republic*, transl. and ed. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN, 2004), 47 (II.369b).

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education* [1762], transl. Allan Bloom (Harmondsworth, 1991), 222.

would need control, restraint, and management if it were to stand a chance of endurance:

Ready as man is to imagine that he produces everything from himself, he is nevertheless dependent on others for the development of his faculties . . . Nature has evidently calculated our whole mechanism, with the condition and duration of each period of our lives, for this foreign aid.³

The logic of Rousseau's and Herder's views led to an argument for social intercourse as the vital means whereby to secure the survival and to define the identity of the individual. For Max Scheler, further developing these ideas around 1900 in the new language of the emotions, the individual human comes into being and is constituted precisely in the context of common experience, with other humans, of sympathy and love.⁴ With a Romantic and psychological inflection, Scheler here recalled the insight of Aristotle, that the potential qualities and full identity of a human individual could only ever be realized through interaction with others. This view has sometimes been amplified by recognition of the complementary variety of human types. A long, although discontinuous, philosophical tradition has constructed various plans for human association in society on the basis of a shared recognition, not only of human weakness, but also of human diversity. For Hannah Arendt, it was this fact of human difference which created the absolute necessity for social interaction:

Action would be an unnecessary luxury, a capricious interference with the general laws of behaviour, if men were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence was the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing. Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.⁵

Over and above the simple fact of our inability to look after ourselves, our diversity reinforces our mutual dependence, compelling us to look to one another for complementary skills and strength.

GUILDS

But on what basis of confidence can the individual turn to his or her neighbour for support? Answers to this question have varied with the experience of the

³ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 3 vols (Leipzig, 1869), ii. 100–1; transl. T. Churchill, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (London, 1800), 225–6.

⁴ Max Scheler, *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, transl. Peter Heath as *The Nature of Sympathy* (Hamden, CT, 1973).

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London, 1958), 8.

theorists themselves. Reassured by the company of his fellow Athenian citizens, Aristotle could declare that mutual friendship would be the basis of every fully human life. From this Aristotelian conviction is derived the long Western history of civic republicanism, based on the principles of mutuality and shared responsibility. Yet the bitter experience of civil war led Thomas Hobbes to a far less optimistic assessment of the constructive potential of human collaboration, and to conclude that it was better that an overarching, authoritarian state should strictly limit fraternization in the interests of the security of each isolated individual. These ideas, together with others which have engaged in dialogue with them, have transcended their original contexts, and the problem they address may be said to be a perennial question. It is a pressing issue what answer we should give to this question today. In so far as the individual perceives a need for protection from the greed or the violence of others, should he or she look for this in the mutual support of neighbours, or should it be guaranteed by the state? Does the potential strength of the one reinforce, or does it necessarily compromise the integrity of the other? Are voluntary associations to be welcomed as cradles of citizenship, or regarded with suspicion as threats to public order?

This book is concerned with one chapter in the long history of this debate. It takes as its subject the diverse and extremely numerous medieval societies known to contemporaries by the various names, in England, of guilds and fraternities, and in other parts of Europe as *Bruderschaften*, *confréries*, and *confraternite*. As a form of voluntary association, bound by oath and by a (usually modest) material subscription, the fraternity or guild was widespread in late-medieval England and continental Europe. Both the ubiquity and the frequency of the form have been underlined by recent historical case-studies.⁶ While the particular purpose and activities of a fraternity might be infinitely various, the organization may be characterized in general as combining pious with social, economic, and political purposes. Its declared aims invariably included important religious functions, expressed in the invocation of a saintly patron and an annual mass with prayers for deceased members. With equal certainty, the annual feast day would bring the members together for a drink

⁶ English local studies: Virginia Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside: Social and Religious Change in Cambridgeshire, c.1350–1558* (Woodbridge, 1996); David J. F. Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power: Religious Gilds in Late Medieval Yorkshire, 1389–1547* (Woodbridge, 2000); Ken Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia, c.1470–1550* (Woodbridge, 2001); Margaret Harvey, *Lay Religious Life in Late Medieval Durham* (Woodbridge, 2006), 157–68. Comparative European examples: Danilo Zardin, ed., *Corpi, 'fraternità', mestieri nella storia della società europea* (Rome, 1998); Monika Escher-Apsner, ed., *Mittelalterliche Bruderschaften in europäischen Städten. Funktionen, Formen, Akteure* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009); Ian A. Gadd and Patrick Wallis, eds, *Guilds and Association in Europe, 900–1900* (London, 2006); Christopher Black and Pamela Gravestock, eds, *Early Modern Confraternities in Europe and the Americas: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Aldershot, 2006).

or a meal to celebrate their community. The overwhelming majority of English guilds admitted women alongside men: a feature generally characteristic of the guilds of medieval northern Europe, although not so prevalent in the Mediterranean world. Sometimes described in modern English accounts as ‘parish fraternities’, these clubs indeed were often founded by groups of parishioners and regularly made use of an altar in a parish church as a devotional focus; yet they as often drew their memberships from a wider field than that of the parish, whose bounds they readily transcended. Use of this terminology, with its particular emphasis upon piety and locality, risks underestimating the dynamic potential of a guild for building creative, this-worldly connections between sometimes scattered individuals and interests.⁷ Still valid, however, is the pertinent observation of Gabriel Le Bras, who spoke of the medieval guild as ‘une paroisse consensuelle’: for the phrase captures at once the voluntarism of the organization and its potential to dissolve or subvert existing institutional structures.⁸ An individual might join more than one guild, thereby extending still further the range of his or her contacts. A significant minority of fraternities crystallized around a particular trade, like the London guild of St John the Baptist linked to the craft of the tailors. In such a case, while the distinct organization of the craft (the *Zunft*, or *arte*, of German and Italian sources) attended to the secular administration of the trade, the guild (or *Bruderschaft*, or *confraternita*) was the expression of the social and devotional aspirations of the tailoring community. The overwhelming majority of guilds, however, were not tied by such association to a single craft, but brought together representatives of various trades and professions. This diversity was of their essence.

In the interest of coherence, a decision has been taken to focus this study on English guilds. However, the arguments to be developed here for England apply also, with qualifications, to other regions. Scholarship on fraternities in other parts of Europe will be drawn upon for comparative purposes. The most significant English particularity to be borne in mind was the precocious development of the state. The voluntarism of the guilds in this environment has to be seen within the framework of what, by the standards of the later Middle Ages, was a relatively centralized polity.⁹ The jealous power of the crown, indeed, contributed more than once to aggressive investigations into

⁷ The language of ‘the parochial’ was used in the English context with deliberate pious emphasis by H. F. Westlake, *The Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England* (London, 1919); Westlake, ‘The origin, purposes, and development of parish gilds in England’, *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, 17 (1921), 163–74. For recent usage of the term see Caroline M. Barron, ‘The parish fraternities of medieval London’, in C. M. Barron and C. Harper-Bill, eds, *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society* (Woodbridge, 1985), 13–37, *passim*; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven and London, 1992), 145 (‘the majority [*sc.* of the guilds] were essentially parochial in character’).

⁸ Gabriel Le Bras, ‘Les confréries chrétiennes’ [1941], repr. in his *Études de sociologie religieuse*, ii (Paris, 1956), 423–62, at p. 454.

⁹ See Ch. 6 and esp. pp. 211–13.

the guilds. Both a national inquiry concerning fraternities of 1388–9 and a survey of guilds and chantries in the 1540s were partly motivated by suspicion of organizations alleged to have built up material endowments to support a subversive degree of political autonomy. The eventual suppression of all of the English fraternities (with the exception of a handful of trading corporations which were licensed to continue in modified form) in the mid-sixteenth century was in part the consequence of religious change, but needs to be seen also in the context of further centralization in royal government at this time.¹⁰ Measures taken against the guilds in moments of insecurity by the king of France and by the signoria of Florence might appear to confirm the supposition that guilds and state were ultimately incompatible.¹¹ But the case of later medieval England shows that guilds could proliferate within the context of a comparatively centralized polity. It has been a persistent tendency of historians to identify vigorous voluntary organizations as an index of the infancy or immaturity of broader political consciousness and of state institutions. An influential view in the historiography of the Italian medieval communes has been that associational or communal movements are a function of the weakness of the state.¹² In the case of late-medieval Germany, the same conviction that guild power corresponds with state weakness has claimed support from the particular prominence, in some regions, of amalgamations of craft associations which engaged in political conflict.¹³ The English evidence shows that the correlation is not so simple, and calls for refinement. Indeed, this study of guilds in medieval England contributes to a larger shift in historical understanding of late-medieval polities, which rejects the long assumed binary opposition between local networks and an idealized image of the fully integrated state.¹⁴ It is becoming better understood that centralized polities have evolved in relationships with associational networks which, while sometimes conflictual, have also been mutually reinforcing.

¹⁰ *Statutes of the Realm*, iii. 24–33, 988–93. The declared motives of Henry VIII in 1545 (when the guilds were expropriated) were fiscal; those of Protector Somerset in 1547 (when the guilds were dissolved) were religious. Both moves against the guilds, however, should also be seen in the context of the concern of the mid-Tudor regime to limit local autonomy. S. J. Gunn, *Early Tudor Government, 1485–1558* (London, 1995), 173–5; David M. Loades, *The Mid-Tudor Crisis 1545–1565* (London, 1992).

¹¹ Gustave Fagniez, *Études sur l'industrie et la classe industrielle à Paris au XIIIe et au XIVe siècle* (Paris, 1871), 51; Henri Hauser, *Ouvriers du temps passé (XVe–XVIe siècles)* (Paris, 1899), 166–8; Robert Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1982), 192.

¹² e.g. Antonio Ivan Pini, *L'associazionismo medievale: comuni e corporazioni* (Bologna, 1976), 3–4 and *passim*.

¹³ F. Irsigler, 'Zur Problematik der Gilde- und Zunftterminologie', in B. Schweineköper, ed., *Gilden und Zünfte. Kaufmännische und gewerbliche Genossenschaften im frühen und hohen Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen, 1985), 57–70, at pp. 68–70.

¹⁴ On the general issue see John Watts, *The Making of Politics: Europe, 1300–1500* (Cambridge, 2009).

The chronological scope of the book, which extends from the late thirteenth to the early sixteenth century, is relevant not merely to England but to western Christendom in general. As will be discussed in more detail below, historical circumstances contributed to a proliferation of guild foundations from the thirteenth century onwards. At the latter end of the period, the religious Reform movements of the sixteenth century would have the effect either of eliminating the fraternities altogether or of transforming them into very different organizations. The Protestant rejection of Catholic beliefs and practices related to purgatory and intercession for the dead marked a terminus for the guilds of England as of other parts of northern Europe. The Catholic Church in southern Europe in the same period, anxious to tighten its pastoral control, continued to license confraternities on the condition that they were subject to parish priests, draining them in the process of what had been their most significant source of life during the preceding three centuries.

The commencement of the period under review was not the beginning of the guilds; but the overwhelming evidence of the known sources indicates that the second half of the thirteenth and the first few decades of the fourteenth century witnessed unprecedented numbers of guild foundations. This was the period in which western Europe experienced the dangerous climax of an extended period of population growth which had begun around 1000, but of which the curve rose steeply towards 1300 to reach a crisis point. The population was unevenly distributed; but in both the towns and the countryside of the more economically developed regions—notably central and northern Italy, north-west France and Flanders, and south-eastern England—overcrowding created a perilous environment. A harvest failure could lead to catastrophic mortality, as happened across large parts of Europe in the great famine of 1315. Demographic instability was intensified with the arrival in 1348 of the plague, which on its first impact carried off up to half of the population. The loss of family and neighbours who died of the Black Death throughout the later medieval period, during which the disease remained endemic, inevitably affected the attitudes and strategies of the survivors. Many of these took to the roads, seeking to take what advantage they could of rising wages in the constrained labour market. Whether as a result of increased mortality or because of the diaspora of workers, especially in the urbanized areas whose crowded cottages and tenements suffered the highest death rates and yet which seemed to promise employment to fresh arrivals, local populations became more fluid than they had ever been. In consequence they faced responsibility for individuals left without the support network of family members, and the challenge of establishing a peaceful *modus vivendi* amongst strangers.¹⁵ These were not novel phenomena in the later medieval

¹⁵ N. J. G. Pounds, *An Economic History of Medieval Europe*, 2nd edn (London, 1994), ch. 10. This context of guild formation was underlined in Gervase Rosser, 'Solidarités et changement

centuries; but the degree of their intensity was unprecedented. The rich had means to cushion themselves from these pressures, at least to some degree, as did the fictional young Florentine gallants of Boccaccio's *Decameron* who retreated from the deathly chaos of the city to the garden of a country villa, in order to pass the period of an epidemic in the telling of stories.¹⁶ But most felt the destabilizing effects of change. A widespread experience of deracination and vulnerability contributed directly to the proliferation of guilds in the period under consideration.

POLITICIZED HISTORIES

This book is not an institutional history of the English guilds between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Its aim is, rather, from a necessarily selective sample, to discern patterns of aspiration and activity amongst the members of these highly miscellaneous societies, and if possible to learn from their experience. The interest here is not in the guilds as structures, but in the social, political, and moral processes which were catalysed by participation in these diverse associations. Interpretation of the guilds has always been a political issue, and this continues to be the case. As will become apparent from the following paragraphs, to write about the medieval guilds today is necessarily to engage with a cluster of issues surrounding the identity and rights of the individual, the role of the state, and the potential of community politics. In this sense, the present historian can no more claim indifferent objectivity than her or his predecessors; nor, indeed, should it be necessary to do so. Provided the research is free of a particular agenda, its ultimate justification may be that its findings, from the experience of those who have responded to analogous challenges in the past, can help to inform the debates of the present.

So miscellaneous were these bodies that no coherent history could be written which took them as its central subject. Historians have oscillated between unsuccessful attempts at definition and a more convincing acknowledgement that precise categorization is impossible. Without some such loosely descriptive definition as has been given above, research could not proceed. On the other hand, more precise definitions tend to prejudice interpretation.

social: les fraternités urbaines anglaises à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Annales—Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 48 (1993), 1127–43. Jacques Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité de l'au-delà: les hommes, la mort et la religion dans la région d'Avignon à la fin du Moyen Âge, vers 1320–vers 1480* (Rome, 1980), ch. 3, also argues that fraternities multiplied as people moved, increasingly after c.1100, away from their families to the towns.

¹⁶ Boccaccio, *The Decameron* (c.1350), Introduction to the First Day.

The jurist Wilhelm Wilda, the first scholar seriously to attempt to write a history of guilds, while he acknowledged Roman precedents, in his monograph of 1831 traced their origins primarily to freely formed, pre-Christian Germanic associations.¹⁷ Yet Wilda's perception of a liberal principle in the guilds provoked criticism at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the conservative historian Georg von Below. Although he claimed to be in broad agreement with Wilda, von Below, who until its demise was profoundly loyal to the Prussian monarchy, preferred to see the medieval guilds as the successors of Roman corporations, sanctioned by the state. Seen in this light, the guild was not, as it was for Wilda, an independent and subversive force contributing to the dissolution of feudalism, but was instead a licensed agent of feudal power.¹⁸ These different interpretative strands fed into the work of Otto von Gierke, who early in his own scholarly career defined the guild as a 'free union' (*freie Einung*).¹⁹ Gierke positioned the guild at the intersection between what he conceived as the two dominant models of political organization: the communitarian (*genossenschaftlich*) and the hierarchical (*herrschaftlich*). With respect to the history of the guilds, Gierke's vision broke the deadlock of nineteenth-century arguments between 'Germanist' and 'Romanist' positions by recognizing that, in the course of their evolution, these bodies had acquired elements corresponding to each of those idealized philosophical traditions.²⁰ Historical scholarship in the following century would vindicate the argument that the guilds had roots in both the Teutonic and the Roman past.²¹ Gierke's account, which would have an enduring influence on subsequent scholarship,²² had the particular advantage

¹⁷ Wilhelm Wilda, *Das Gildenwesen im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1831), 3–24.

¹⁸ Georg von Below, 'Die Motive der Zunftbildung im deutschen Mittelalter', in his *Probleme der Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Tübingen, 1926), 258–301, argues against the view that the free development of trade required the dissolution of lordship, and in support of an image of the organized crafts, when these appeared, as agencies of established authority ('Die Zunft tritt uns als ein unter Sanktion der Gemeindegewalt errichteter Zwangsverband entgegen', p. 274).

¹⁹ Otto von Gierke, *Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht*, vol. i, *Rechtsgeschichte der deutschen Genossenschaft* (Berlin, 1868); English transl. by Mary Fischer, ed. Antony Black, *Community in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 1990), esp. pp. 18–31.

²⁰ See also the third volume of Gierke's *Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht*, *Die Staats- und Korporationslehre des Altertums und des Mittelalters und ihre Aufnahme in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1881); English transl. F. W. Maitland, *Political Theories of the Middle Age* (Cambridge, 1900), esp. pp. 37–8 ('Clearly in the first instance what lies before us is the Germanic idea of a Fellowship (*die germanische Genossenschaftsidee*) . . . But antique elements were at work in this quarter also. In part their introduction was due to the Romano-Canonical doctrine of Corporations, whence the publicists were wont to borrow, and in part to the influence of the Political Law and Political Philosophy of the ancient world . . .').

²¹ P. S. Leicht, *Corporazioni romane e arti medievali* (Turin, 1937); Émile Coornaert, 'Les gildes médiévales (Ve–XIVe siècles). Définition. Évolution', *Revue historique*, 199 (1948), 22–55, 208–43.

²² G. Dilcher, 'Die genossenschaftliche Struktur von Gilden und Zünften', in Schwineköper, ed., *Gilden und Zünfte*, 71–111, esp. pp. 71–8.

of moving beyond a single, essentialized model of the guild to situate the institution within a dynamic interplay between competing social and political forces. To see the guilds as kinetic and adaptive organizations, engaged in an evolutionary way with the social history of which they formed a part, is necessarily to resist any precise or static definition of the form. This stance has been defended more recently by Otto Gerhard Oexle, who from the 1980s conducted a research seminar with a particular focus on early medieval guilds, and who has produced a number of significant essays in which he has defended a *Gildekonzept* which is relatively loosely defined as 'an association bound by oath'.²³ In support of Oexle's latitudinarian position, it may be observed that in documented practice, all of the associations which on a broad definition may be called guilds demonstrated a multifunctional mixture of economic, social, and religious activities, which defies any narrower categorization. Some have found this too imprecise, and have urged the adoption of more distinctions.²⁴ When, however—as is the case in the present book—the perspective is shifted from that of the organization as such, and is focused instead upon the motives and ambitions of the individuals who came together to form and maintain a guild in a particular context, exact institutional definition becomes not merely unimportant, but a positive hindrance to understanding. Historical records, being created in many cases by formally constituted organizations, tend to reify these bodies, bestowing upon their institutional status an exaggerated importance.²⁵ While such records are what the historian has to work with, the focus here is not upon the guilds as institutions but upon the role of guild membership in the negotiation of a relationship between the individual and society. Fraternity is taken here to be

²³ Otto Gerhard Oexle, 'Gilden als soziale Gruppen in der Karolingerzeit', in H. Jankuhn, W. Janssen, R. Schmidt-Wiegand, and H. Tiefenbach, eds, *Das Handwerk in vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Zeit*, i (Göttingen, 1981), 284–354; Oexle, 'Die mittelalterliche Zunft als Forschungsproblem', *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, 118 (1982), 1–44; Oexle, 'Conjuratio et gilde dans l'antiquité et dans le haut moyen âge. Remarques sur la continuité des formes de la vie sociale', *Francia*, 10 (1982), 1–19; Oexle, 'Les groupes sociaux du moyen âge et les débuts de la sociologie contemporaine', *Annales—Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* (1992), 751–65.

²⁴ Irsigler, 'Zur Problematik der Gilde- und Zunftterminologie', 53–70, suggests that historians have been confused by the medieval English sources, which tend to speak without distinction of 'guilds'; yet this author concludes by admitting the ambiguity of many German records. Thomas Frank, *Bruderschaften im spätmittelalterlichen Kirchenstadt. Viterbo, Orvieto, Assisi* (Tübingen, 2002), 10–11, insists that Oexle's *Gildekonzept* is too generalized for analytical use, especially in the late-medieval context. Yet Frank's own attempt to establish a series of fine distinctions only leads him to admit to the existence of 'a grey area' which persistently subverts any attempt at neat categorization. Frank, *Bruderschaften*, 4–21, esp. p. 15.

²⁵ Recent scholarship has tended towards the adoption of relatively general definitions. Ludwig Remling, 'Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte des spätmittelalterlichen Bruderschaftswesens in Franken', in Peter Johanek, ed., *Einungen und Bruderschaften in der spätmittelalterlichen Stadt* (Cologne, 1993), 149–69, at pp. 150–1; Monika Escher-Apsner, 'Mittelalterliche Bruderschaften in europäischen Städten. Funktionen, Formen, Akteure', in Escher-Apsner, ed., *Mittelalterliche Bruderschaften*, 9–27, at pp. 11–17.

one of the 'imaginative structures' through which late-medieval men and women both conceived and actively shaped their world.²⁶

The medieval guilds have continued to be surrounded by a conceptual frame which has tended to limit modern understanding of their particular character and historical distinctiveness and, at the same time, to prevent the deduction from their example of reliable conclusions concerning their wider and enduring significance. Standing in the way of a full and measured understanding of the subject have been ideological battles in which diverse accounts of the guilds have been recruited in the service of unhistorical polemics. Various typologies of the guild have been invoked in order to vindicate one or another position in a recurrent debate between the respectively claimed merits of individualistic and communitarian models of society. In consequence, discussions of medieval guilds—whether or not this has been acknowledged by their authors—have tended to be both coloured and distorted by modern concerns. The recent boom of scholarly interest in the guilds of medieval Europe has yielded a wealth of publications which has, in general, been much stronger in empirical description than it has in explicit conceptual reflection. Yet this renewed fascination for the subject is not hard to explain in terms of the immediate social and political context. Against the background of the Second World War and the Paris events of 1968, historians who singled out a communal tradition in the European past offered an alternative narrative to that which led to the present day through the unpalatable stage of the absolutist state. This has been particularly evident in the work of Peter Blickle, whose 'communalism thesis' was developed as a means to show the German people, in the aftermath of national socialism, as not essentially given to acceptance of hierarchical subjection. Blickle suggested that not only the German territories since the later Middle Ages, but the whole of European history might be seen through the same lens, which would distinguish areas and periods of 'communal concentration'.²⁷ Communal arguments were adopted not only by late twentieth-century critics of political hierarchy but also by opponents of the radical individualism which became rampant in the period, and which was epitomized in philosophical terms by John Rawls's *Political Liberalism* of 1993.²⁸ Mounting concern about the dangers of unbridled insistence upon individual rights gave rise to renewed fascination with

²⁶ The term 'imaginative structures' is used by Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton, 1992), 4.

²⁷ Peter Blickle, *Obedient Germans? A Rebuttal: A New View of German History*, transl. Thomas A. Brady (Charlottesville, VA, and London, 1997); Blickle, *Kommunalismus: Skizzen einer gesellschaftlichen Organisationsform*, 2 vols (Munich, 2000). See R. W. Scribner, 'Communalism: universal category or ideological construct? A debate in the historiography of early modern Germany and Switzerland', *Historical Journal*, 37 (1994), 199–207.

²⁸ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York, 1993).

cultural models which could be used to challenge the ascendancy of individualistic values.

During the same years, however, criticism of the perceived excesses of the modern state has led conservative thinkers to appropriate the guilds to serve quite different political arguments. A particular interest in the history of European guilds was catalysed at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by the work of the sociologist Robert Putnam. Taking his cue from Alexis de Tocqueville's earlier observations on North American society, Putnam wrote, in *Bowling Alone* (2000), an elegy to the local, voluntary association: the tango society, the neighbourhood fête, the after-school club.²⁹ Tocqueville, visiting the small towns of early nineteenth-century North America, had been struck by the multiplicity of local societies which, in his slightly idealized view, were both an education for their members in the values of public service and at the same time a counterweight to the potential oppression of modern democratic government. Fearful of what he saw as the ominous, 'immense, protective power' of the French state in the aftermath of the Revolution and the Napoleonic reforms, the aristocratic Tocqueville hoped to see a revitalization of local political culture in which participation was valued and fostered through the activities of voluntary associations. Otherwise, he argued, society would become an enfeebled collection of disinterested individuals, each 'shut up in the solitude of his own heart'.³⁰ Tocqueville's arguments recalled those of the sixteenth-century French jurist and political philosopher, Jean Bodin, who had insisted that a balance should be maintained between the authority of government and the rights of local communities represented by guilds. Bodin had urged not only that such a combination would be a check on tyranny, but also that voluntary associations embodied a principle of fellowship without which, in his view, no polity could exist:

It remains to be decided whether a commonwealth can dispense with associations and guilds . . . to ask whether communities and corporate associations are necessary to the commonwealth, is to ask if the commonwealth can subsist without fellowship (*amitié*), which even the world itself cannot do.³¹

Claiming authority from Tocqueville, and charting a thirty-year decline in the life of such societies across the United States at the end of the twentieth century, Robert Putnam developed the hypothesis that the very stability and

²⁹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, 2000). The argument was pressed further in Robert D. Putnam, Lewis M. Feldstein, and Don Cohen, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (New York and London, 2003).

³⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* [1835–40], transl. George Lawrence and ed. J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner (New York, 1966), 667, 478.

³¹ Jean Bodin, *Les six livres de la République* [1583], ed. and abbreviated by Gérard Mairet (Paris, 1993), 184, and see also p. 185.

strength of the state itself depended upon the vitality of local community life and upon the 'social capital' which he understood individuals to accrue by participation in that environment. With growing speed since the 1960s, according to Putnam, Americans 'have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities'. In an earlier work, Putnam had argued that differential degrees of participation by Italian citizens in modern political life were explicable in terms of distinct regional histories, going back to the Middle Ages, of greater or less experience of involvement in civic communes and social guilds.³² While these arguments have been challenged on empirical and historical grounds, their impact at the level of national politics has been profound. The United States government began after 2000 to collect data on participation in voluntary societies as part of the Current Population Survey; in 2008 Putnam met with President George W. Bush and in 2013 he received the National Humanities Medal; and local communalism, from being in the opinion of Bodin and Tocqueville a crucial check on the oppressive power of the state, has been appropriated by today's conservative politicians as both a practical means and an ideological justification for the devolution of government responsibilities to voluntary neighbourhood groups. The use of history in such a context tends to be highly selective. Neoliberal thought embraces precedents for the empowerment of neighbourhoods and the contraction of the state, but is less interested in arguments, developed in the course of older debates, in favour of a balance of responsibilities between the two. Nor does historical experience support in any simple way the argument advanced by Putnam and others, that a healthy culture of voluntarism will naturally strengthen the state. As in the case, for example, of Scotland, strong social ties in the civic sphere have the potential to subvert the state entirely.³³

Selective and partial pseudo-historical reasoning is rife. Tocqueville's work on America has also been deployed by a Leo Straussian critic of the welfare state such as Paul Rahe, according to whom the expanding role of national government in the United States has rendered its subject population a passive victim of despotism.³⁴ In Britain this thinking was adopted by the Conservative Party and expressed by David Cameron from 2005 as the policy of the 'Big Society'. The Party's manifesto of 2010 declared:

Our plans to reform public services, mend our broken society, and rebuild trust in politics are all part of our Big Society agenda. These plans involve redistributing

³² Robert D. Putnam with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, 1993).

³³ Lindsay Paterson et al., *New Scotland, New Politics* (Edinburgh, 2001). The 45 per cent of voters in the referendum on Scottish independence in September 2014 who favoured outright secession from the UK drew their inspiration not only from political parties but from a strong grass-roots culture of localist activity and feeling.

³⁴ Paul Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and the Modern Prospect* (New Haven and London, 2009).

power from the state to society; from the centre to local communities, giving people the opportunity to take more control over their lives.³⁵

Returning to the theme in 2014, Cameron even claimed divine authority for the policy: 'Jesus invented the Big Society 2000 years ago. I just want to see more of it.'³⁶ In a context of global economic recession, conservative national governments, not always sympathetic to the politics of local communities, have seized upon a radically decentralized model of voluntarism as a means to disburden themselves of public services they can no longer—without tax increases to which they are resistant—afford to sustain. Governments of every political stamp are faced with new and particular versions of a perennial set of questions concerning the relationship of the individual to society, and the role to be played in that relationship by the state. The opportunistic invocation of the past by recent policy-makers of diverse political leanings has been vitiated by reliance upon over-simplified models of both states and networks, and by the absence from the debate of a much-needed rigorous historical dimension.

'COMMUNITY' VERSUS 'THE INDIVIDUAL'

To arrive at a clearer appreciation of the true character of the medieval guilds, it is necessary to put this modern discussion—as is rarely done by its present-day participants—into a longer perspective. The broad dominance over the past two centuries, especially in French, English, and American political thought, of the tradition of liberal individualism has been intermittently challenged in recent decades; but this very dispute has tended only to reinforce a binary paradigm which sets the shared values of the community against the rights of the individual. The persistence in historical writing on the Middle Ages of an assumed opposition between individual and collective values is a consequence of the enduring force of this same assumption in the various fields of economic, political, and religious thought. A brief glance at each of these areas in recent scholarship will clarify the extent of the historiographical challenge which must be addressed by any new work on the guilds.

The furore which surrounded the publication in 1978 of Alan Macfarlane's book, *The Origins of English Individualism*, regardless of the particular interpretative positions adopted by Macfarlane and his critics, recapitulated a series of older assumptions: that Europe in the Middle Ages, with the possible

³⁵ Conservative Party, *Invitation to Join the Government of Great Britain. The Conservative Manifesto 2010* (n.p., 2010), 37.

³⁶ 'David Cameron: "Jesus invented the Big Society—I'm just continuing God's work"', *The Independent*, 13 April 2014.

exception of England, was characterized by a prevalence of communal values; that the exercise of independent economic choice by individuals was a mark of modernization; and that community and individualism were perennial and incompatible antitypes.³⁷ A great deal of subsequent research has borne out Macfarlane's claim, in part, by demonstrating the existence of early peasant markets both in England and in other parts of medieval Europe.³⁸ But the theoretical challenge of the book, and of *The Culture of Capitalism* (1987) in which Macfarlane again discussed the role of individualism in the construction of modernity, has not led to a larger debate which might have given rise to a new understanding of the relationship between individual and society in the later Middle Ages.³⁹

The recurrent tendency to fall back into a binary distinction has been no less evident in the field of political ideas. Antony Black's study of *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present*, first published in 1984 and reissued in 2003 with the significantly revised title *Guild and State*, was on the one hand concerned to recover 'an older, atavistic notion of community', and on the other to show how this social model was challenged already in the medieval period by 'the ideals of individual liberty and security of person and property, maintained by equality under the law'.⁴⁰ Even while drawing attention to what he argued had been an enduring strand of communal political thought, therefore, Black helped further to consolidate a polarized separation between what he presented as essentially distinct traditions, concerned respectively with communal values and with individual rights. The same scholar, writing in the *Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought* under the heading of 'the individual and society', weighed up 'the balance between communal sentiment (relating to town, village, gild) and individual sentiment' in the later medieval centuries, which balance he concluded 'was tilted more towards the communal than today'.⁴¹

The original title of the book by Antony Black differentiates a continuum of guild ideas from 'civil society'. This term has been applied to a confusing diversity of phenomena since its use in relation to the Polish Solidarity movement in the 1980s. In Black's book, it means a space in which the

³⁷ Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition* (Oxford, 1978).

³⁸ Pounds, *Economic History*, chs 8–9; Edward Miller and John Hatcher, *Medieval England: Towns, Commerce and Crafts, 1086–1348* (London, 1995), 155–80 and chs 5–6; Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England: Rural Society and Economic Change, 1086–1348* (London, 1978), ch. 3.

³⁹ Alan Macfarlane, *The Culture of Capitalism* (Oxford, 1987).

⁴⁰ Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London, 1984); reissued as *Guild and State: European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (New Brunswick, NJ, and London, 2003).

⁴¹ Antony Black, 'The individual and society', in J. H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350–c.1450* (Cambridge, 1988), 588–606, at p. 606.

equal rights of citizens are guaranteed by public authority: hence its equivalence to 'the state' in the revised title. More recently, 'civil society' has been identified with supranational and global concepts of justice and human rights. Meanwhile, a particular strand of historical analysis has been using the term to differentiate and compare national histories. In this context, Britain has been cited as a paradigm of 'civil society': that is, a country in which a successful balance was allegedly struck, from a relatively early date, between the nation state on the one hand and, on the other, a vibrant complex of voluntary associations expressive of the diverse local and particular interests of society.⁴² Understood in this sense, 'civil society' appears less far removed from the guilds than it does in the binary framework of Black's study. Provided that we free our interest in associations from teleological assumptions (which underlie much of the recent literature on civil society) about either the birth of the modern state or the rise of democracy, the notion of civil society may continue to be useful to describe the context, within the state, in which voluntary groupings can potentially flourish.

While economic liberalism and political visions of the individual and civil society have done much to condition the way in which the medieval guilds have been perceived, it may be that the most potent and enduring of the several influences which have shaped received views of these associations has been the sixteenth-century religious Reformation. Protestant rhetoric concerning the liberation of private conscience and personal dialogue with God, while qualified in ecclesiastical practice by public and collective obligations imposed upon members of the new Churches, presented the Reform in emphatically individualistic terms. The late-medieval Catholic Church was projected in this context as an unthinking flock of sheep, deserving of the pity, at best, of those better able to think for themselves. This Lutheran and more broadly Protestant view of medieval religion has continued to be enormously influential. Recent historical accounts of the Church at the end of the Middle Ages have refuted many times over the crudely negative stereotyping of both Protestant and Catholic writings during and after the sixteenth-century movements for religious Reform.⁴³ But the historiography of the late-medieval Church has none the less continued to be inflected by a supposed tension between the public worship of the community and the reflexive interiority of the individual which was announced by the sixteenth-century Reformers as

⁴² José Harris, 'From Richard Hooker to Harold Laski: changing perceptions of civil society in British political thought, late sixteenth to early twentieth centuries', in José Harris, ed., *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003), 13–37.

⁴³ It is important to emphasize the enormous subsequent influence of the Tridentine, no less than the Protestant, critique of late-medieval religion. Catholic clerical suspicion of lay independence colours the critical remarks on guilds in Étienne Delaruelle, Edmond René Labande, and Paul Ourliac, *L'Église au temps du Grand Schisme et de la crise conciliaire (1378–1449)*, 2 vols (Paris, 1962–4), ii. 688; Paul Adam, *La vie paroissiale en France au XIV^e siècle* (Paris, 1964), 50.

the catalyst—provided that the conflict could be resolved by the triumph of the independent Christian soul—of spiritual salvation. Against the background of this discourse, one strand of historical argument has reaffirmed, but this time with a positive emphasis, the collective principle in late-medieval Catholicism. Recent accounts of pre-Reformation guilds and fraternities, together with studies of contemporary parish life, have implicitly contributed to such a position, albeit few of these have been explicitly theorized. Scholars concerned to emphasize the vitality of the pre-Reformation Church and its rootedness in contemporary society have cited the fraternities in support of this vision of communal piety.⁴⁴ An exceptional contribution to this field, which ranges across the historiographical watershed of the sixteenth century, is John Bossy's *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700*. Bossy regarded the medieval mass as 'a social institution', and found much to celebrate in the communal interaction fostered by Catholic practices of god-parenting, charity, and, indeed, the formation of fraternities. By contrast, he saw the punitive concern with individual conscience and private soul-searching which were prioritized not only by Protestant but also by Catholic reformers of the early modern period as amounting to a regrettable departure from the social values of late-medieval Catholicism.⁴⁵

A different approach has been that of historians of late-medieval Christianity who have singled out, instead, what they have identified as a growing field of interiorized 'private devotion'. The material culture of portable holy images and prayer books, together with the dissemination of mystical models of piety such as the visionary experiences of Meister Eckhart, Catherine of Siena, and Julian of Norwich, have been cited as indicators of an increasingly individualized, personal piety at the close of the Middle Ages.⁴⁶ While these modern studies have not, on the whole, been presented as an explicit response to the challenge of traditional Protestant historiography, their underlying derivation from the polemics of the Reformation era is no less evident than in the case of Bossy's celebration of the more social aspects of the medieval Catholic community. Even André Vauchez, who has illuminated every aspect of late-medieval religion, distinguishes between two separate and 'contrary' traditions, respectively of the public cult of the saints and of the private world of the mystics.⁴⁷ Beneath all of these arguments lie the assumptions that religious life

⁴⁴ J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984), 19–39; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 141–54. See also the references cited in n. 6 to this chapter.

⁴⁵ John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), esp. pp. 57–63. The ideas were first developed in John Bossy, 'The Counter-Reformation and the people of Catholic Europe', *Past and Present*, 47 (1970), 51–70.

⁴⁶ e.g. Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge, 1988), esp. pp. 197, 227. Earlier English writing on medieval mysticism, such as the influential books of Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941), came out of the Anglo-Catholic movement within the Anglican Church.

⁴⁷ André Vauchez, *Les laïcs au Moyen Âge. Pratiques et expériences religieuses* (Paris, 1987), 287–8.

is essentially to be understood, depending on the priorities and the method of the historian, as either 'social' or 'private', and that the late-medieval and early-modern periods witnessed a shift (sooner or later, according to taste) from an earlier dominance of the former to the progressive ascendancy of the latter as the superior site of devotional experience. However, this commonly invoked distinction between 'public' and 'private' religious life is deeply problematic, and especially so in the context of late-medieval Europe, in the absence, at that time, even of the suggestion that there could be a separation between matters of personal conscience and of social behaviour.

'WORMS IN THE ENTRAILS'

The modern historian of the guilds has therefore to deal with the terms of a series of interrelated debates which, over the past five centuries, have become so far naturalized within Western culture that it requires a deliberate effort to identify and, potentially, to see beyond them. To consider afresh the conditions of possibility of human society, both as these were understood by the participants in the medieval guilds and as they might be considered, in the light of that medieval experience, in the present, calls for a critical perspective on the ways in which the question has been framed in the intervening centuries. At the watershed of all modern ideas about the relationship between collective identities and individual rights and liberties stands Thomas Hobbes, within whose ideal Commonwealth there was simply no legitimate space for voluntary or local associations. In the *Leviathan*, such bodies are demonized as 'worms in the entrails of a natural man'.⁴⁸ They would be eliminated by Hobbes's modern state, in which the security of each member was guaranteed by the subject's individual contract with the ruler. Hobbes roundly dismissed the Aristotelian notion of man's natural sociability, as the basis for political life, as 'false'.⁴⁹ Fear of the subversive potential of elective association led Hobbes to conclude, in an argument which has continued to resonate to the present day, that sovereignty could only ensure political order by the elimination of all social interaction other than the strictly limited relation between protection and obedience. To these Hobbesian arguments can be traced the tendency of subsequent political thought to give more attention to the relation between the individual and the state than to any potential role, in the space between these two actors, of voluntary communitarian associations. For three

⁴⁸ Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan* [1651], ed. C.-B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth, 1968), 375 (II.29).

⁴⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen* [*De cive*, 1642], transl. Michael Silverthorne and ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, 1998), 21–2 (I.1).

centuries after Hobbes, indeed, communitarian ideas were banished from the main stream of Western political thought. Rousseau similarly envisaged the all-embracing state as a product of natural law, and as offering no room within it for anything other than its individual subjects.⁵⁰ Individuals were increasingly understood in terms of their personal possessions and their concomitant rights. John Locke defined the citizen, precisely, as a holder of private property, deriving the status of the political individual from his physical body and material goods, which the law would be called upon to protect.⁵¹ Adam Smith elaborated the individualistic model of rational economic man: a typology which, in more or less crudely simplified versions, came in turn to inform the tradition of liberal individualism that has enjoyed such prominence in the West for the past 250 years.⁵² The 'liberty' which has been defined and defended by that tradition has been conceived as attaching to the individual person.⁵³ From the French Revolution to current debates on the balance between citizen rights and national security, the dominant strand of Western political thought has been predicated on a vision of society comprising just two players: the individual (endowed with a variable body of rights) and the state (to which is assigned, as a primary responsibility, the protection of the goods and security of its subjects). This broad emphasis upon the autonomous individual has for much of the same period been informed by a Cartesian vision of men and women as individual agents in the world, defined as human beings by the particularity of their private thoughts. To the presumed isolation and integrity of the human individual according to this view, the Romantic Movement at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries lent both a glamour and a moral status which, in the West, they largely retain today. The Cartesian certainties have recently been questioned, and the idea of the self has been problematized afresh.⁵⁴ However, the possible implications of a less

⁵⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, in *The Social Contract and the Discourses*, transl. G. D. H. Cole and ed. Alan Ryan (London, 1993), esp. pp. 202–3 (II.3): 'It is therefore essential, if the general will is to be able to make itself known, that there should be no partial society in the state and that each citizen should express only his own opinion . . . '.

⁵¹ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (repr. Cambridge, 1988), 287–8 (II.27), 353 (II.131), and 101–9 for discussion.

⁵² Smith himself developed a more nuanced view of the human individual than has been acknowledged by many of his declared followers. Smith did not see self-interest as incompatible with mutual help: 'Man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only.' Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* [1776], ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, 2 vols (Oxford, 1976), i. 26 (I.ii.2).

⁵³ The individual is the axiomatic foundation of Mill's vastly influential *On Liberty*, first published in 1859. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge, 1989). For a somewhat partial argument which finds the roots of modern individualism in selected aspects of medieval Christianity, see Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (London, 2014).

⁵⁴ Shaun Gallagher, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (Oxford, 2011), surveys the now very diverse territory of research in this field. See also n. 110 to this chapter.

rigidly insular conception of selfhood for the interpretation of history have not yet been extensively explored.

‘CRADLES OF POPULAR LIBERTY’

The strength and gathering momentum of the prevailing tradition of individualistic thought have appeared, over the past two centuries, to allow for relatively little compromise or contradiction. Many, today, would take its triumph to be a given: a defining fact of modern Western life. And yet, on closer examination, this branch of the history of ideas proves at every stage to have been more pluralistic and contested than at first appears. In the mid-eighteenth century, the atomism of the Lockean political vision provoked the Scottish political thinker Adam Ferguson to issue a warning. Fearing the ethical consequences of what he saw as a recipe for selfish materialism, Ferguson urged that in the absence of a society which fostered communal interaction, men risked finding themselves with no moral grounding. He highlighted the danger that the material and individualistic basis of the modern state enabled the individual to be a good citizen, and yet a bad man.⁵⁵ The argument did not yet entail an explicit evocation of the earlier guilds; but in due course the case for some form of civility would catalyse the historical recovery of these organizations as a rhetorical strategy. The very culture of Romanticism which idealized the heroic individual paradoxically contributed also to the development of communal thought, through its turn to the medieval past. The earliest general accounts of the guilds of the Middle Ages were written in the context of the German Romantic Movement, and as part of an increasingly critical response to perceived aspects of modernity in Europe. Hegel, and a little later Wilda, saw the guilds as outgrowths of pre-modern society, and as embodying, in their collective identities, an essentially medieval quality.⁵⁶ The tendency of this early literature on the subject was to make special claims for a Teutonic tradition of association: a feature which became especially marked in the historiography of Anglo-Saxon England. For many nineteenth-century commentators, the particularism of English history lay precisely in the precocious development, in the medieval period, of voluntary communities capable of expressing and defending local rights and identities. John Mitchell Kemble, whose interest in the Anglo-Saxons originated while studying with one of the brothers Grimm at Göttingen, declared in

⁵⁵ Harris, ‘From Richard Hooker to Harold Laski’, 24.

⁵⁶ Wilda, *Das Gildenwesen*. For further notes on the early German literature on the medieval guilds, see Oexle, ‘Die mittelalterliche Zunft als Forschungsproblem’; Black, *Guild and State*, p. xx.

his *The Saxons in England* (1849): 'In the times of densest seignorial darkness [the guilds] offered a noble resistance to episcopal and baronial tyranny, and formed the nursing-cradles of popular liberty.'⁵⁷

The question of the relation of local and particular rights to central government was sharpened in Britain by the fierce mid-Victorian debate over the management of schools: the Endowed Schools Act of 1869 brought to a head the issue of whether education should still be entrusted to local and often anciently founded charity boards or should be determined for all by a central committee.⁵⁸ At the same period the positive image of English particularism gained some credence also in German eyes, as Lujo Brentano, having spent some months in Britain during 1868–9 to study the trade unions, wrote in an essay about the medieval guilds, which he saw as precursors of the unions: 'It appears that Englishmen at all times knew better than Continentals how to maintain their right of free and independent action.'⁵⁹ In the eyes of Kemble, as also of William Stubbs and Frederic William Maitland, the guilds of medieval England disproved the Whig narrative of advancing English freedoms, marked by parliamentary reform and national legislation. Refusing to locate the roots of English freedom in the Civil War or in the parliamentary settlement of 1688, these historians traced the vision of national identity instead to the freely formed communities of the Middle Ages. They saw the heights of liberty as having been achieved, not in modern times, but in the medieval past. In the firm belief, however, that this spirit of voluntary community was still vigorous despite the threat presented by the increasing pretensions of the state, the economic historian Arnold Toynbee urged in a lecture printed in 1884 that 'nothing must be done to weaken those habits of individual self-reliance and voluntary association which have built up the greatness of the English people'.⁶⁰

It was this mid-nineteenth-century debate which gave rise to the first phase of significant historical interest in the guilds. The image of the medieval guilds at that time was shaped by perceptions of modernization, and in particular by the idea that a defining feature of modernity was liberal individualism. Thus in 1861 the jurist Henry Maine declared that 'The unit of an ancient society was the family; of a modern society, the individual.'⁶¹ Apologists for self-help and

⁵⁷ John Mitchell Kemble, *The Saxons in England*, 2 vols (London, 1849), ii. 310–11.

⁵⁸ Lawrence Goldman, 'The defection of the middle class: the Endowed Schools Act, the Liberal Party, and the 1874 election', in Peter Ghosh and Lawrence Goldman, eds, *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain: Essays in Memory of Colin Matthew* (Oxford, 2006), 118–35.

⁵⁹ Lujo Brentano, 'On the history and development of guilds, and the origin of trade-unions', in Joshua Toulmin Smith and Lucy Toulmin Smith, eds, *English Gilds*, Early English Text Society, original series, 40 (1870), pp. xlix–cxix. See further J. J. Sheehan, *The Career of Lujo Brentano: A Study of Liberalism and Social Reform in Imperial Germany* (Chicago, 1966).

⁶⁰ Arnold Toynbee, *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution in England* (London, 1884), 219–20.

⁶¹ Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and its Relation to Modern Ideas* [1861], 5th edn (London, 1864), p. xxxii.

individual liberty identified the guilds as the archetypal embodiment of corporate vested interests naturally opposed to freedom of economic enterprise. Both Adam Smith and Karl Marx, despite holding very different moral views of bourgeois wealth, agreed that the corporate self-interest of the guilds had held back the entrepreneurial investment which was necessary to the industrial revolution.⁶² Opponents of unbridled liberalism, meanwhile, tended in general to take a more positive view of the guilds. While important freedoms had been won, the growth of individual liberty had been achieved, some claimed, at the expense of human warmth and values. Marx himself understood that, in the words of his modern commentator G. A. Cohen:

People want belonging *and* freedom, integration *and* independence, community *and* individuality, and when capitalism sacrifices the first member of these and like pairs, it concurrently enfranchises the second.⁶³

Certain Victorian thinkers, however, proposed a less binary conception. They urged that the medieval guilds represented a form of association ideally shaped to function as a foil and a complement to the nation state. A key figure in this debate was J. M. Ludlow, a leading light of the Christian Socialist movement of the mid-nineteenth century. Ludlow stressed what he saw as the continuity between the modern unions and friendly societies, in which he played a prominent role, and the medieval guilds; and he emphasized the ability of both to fulfil roles which the state either lacked the interest or the resources to accomplish.⁶⁴ Ludlow saw a continuing need for both elements in the equation: while recognizing benefits in central government, he did not regard as a desirable goal at any stage the appropriation by the state of all social functions. Talking in 1872 of the possibility of state-funded burial insurance, he declared:

Other witnesses, indeed, with bolder views, wish Government to undertake sick business as well as burial... I cannot say I wish for this. I believe that self-government in ordinary Friendly Societies is a precious thing in itself—an education not to be bartered away for mere indolent safety.⁶⁵

⁶² Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [1759], ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. McFie (New York and Oxford, 1976), 139–44; Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx–Engels Reader*, 2nd edn (New York, 1978), 182–6, 396–7.

⁶³ G. A. Cohen, *History, Labour and Freedom* (Oxford, 1988), 197.

⁶⁴ J. M. Ludlow, 'Old gilds and new friendly and trade societies', *Fortnightly Review*, new series, 6 (Oct. 1869), 390–1, 400, 406. See also Mark Curthoys, *Governments, Labour, and the Law in Mid-Victorian Britain: The Trade Union Legislation of the 1870s* (Oxford, 2004), 104. Another promoter of friendly societies at this time, William Fretton, likewise emphasized the parallel with the medieval guilds, both in form and in moral intention. See his address, apparently to a friendly society in his own town of Coventry: W. G. Fretton, *Ancient Guilds and Modern Friendly Societies* (n.p., n.d. [c.1870]).

⁶⁵ J. M. Ludlow, 'Gilds and friendly societies', *The Contemporary Review*, 21 (1872–3), 553–72, 737–62, at p. 762. On the general point, see further Harold Perkin, 'Individualism versus collectivism in nineteenth-century Britain: a false antithesis', *Journal of British Studies*, 17 (1977), 105–18.

Joshua Toulmin Smith, another prominent social reformer of the Victorian period, was similarly concerned that state legislation for social issues would cultivate passivity and selfishness in the individual citizen. More important than individual freedom, in Smith's view, was what he identified as the principle of mutuality:

Mutuality is the very essence of social and moral life and action. The latter words have indeed no meaning, unless that mutuality of relation is recognised. MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY forms, then, the very bottom and groundwork of all truly sound Institutions in a State.⁶⁶

In his influential essay on *Local Self-Government and Centralization*, published in 1851, Smith argued that 'true freedom' was only attainable through the continual carrying out of communal duties and, in particular, by active 'participation' in the business of government.⁶⁷ This text insists that excessively centralized governments, when they remove responsibilities from subjects, encourage complacency and self-regarding individualism. Considering the means to resist this danger, Smith was drawn to the study of the medieval English guilds. Discovering amongst the public records a cache of documents from a fourteenth-century royal survey of the guilds, he proceeded to transcribe them for an edition which was published posthumously by his daughter, Lucy Toulmin Smith, in 1870.⁶⁸ Joshua Toulmin Smith's comments on the guilds reveal his motive for researching them, in the context of then current debate:

[The guilds'] main characteristic was, to set up something higher than personal gain and mere materialism, as the main object of men living in towns; and to make the teaching of love to one's neighbour be not coldly accepted as a hollow dogma of morality, but known and felt as a habit of life.⁶⁹

Social engagement was thus conceived as the ideal means for the individual Christian to develop his or her moral identity.

The richness of these nineteenth-century debates, and the force of the moral arguments there articulated in favour of collective responsibility and interaction above individual freedom, deserve especially to be recalled since conservative interests have more recently, but reductively, claimed unqualified support for laissez-faire individualism from Victorian thinkers including Joshua Toulmin Smith himself.⁷⁰ Current discussion of the relation of the

⁶⁶ Joshua Toulmin Smith, *A Letter to the Right Honorable Lord Palmerston, MP* (London, 1855), 13.

⁶⁷ Joshua Toulmin Smith, *Local Self-Government and Centralization* (London, 1851). See further John Prest, *Liberty and Locality: Parliament, Permissive Legislation and Ratepayers' Democracies in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990).

⁶⁸ *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith. The volume contains those documents in the series written in English: approximately one-tenth of the total. See pp. 64–5.

⁶⁹ Joshua Toulmin Smith, *Traditions of the Old Crown House* (Birmingham, 1863), 28.

⁷⁰ Ben Weinstein, "Local self-government is true socialism": Joshua Toulmin Smith, the state and character formation', *English Historical Review*, 123 (2008), 1193–228.

individual to society and the state stands only to benefit from enhanced awareness of the legacy of earlier debates and practical historical experience.

COMMUNITY AND MODERNITY

In the 1880s the elements of these debates were systematically reworked in the newly created state of Germany by Ferdinand Tönnies, who counterposed to the artifice and instrumentality of modern *Gesellschaft* (association) a natural and life-enhancing *Gemeinschaft* (community), which had supposedly been more characteristic of the medieval past: 'Community [*Gemeinschaft*] is old, Society [*Gesellschaft*] is new, both as an entity and as a term.'⁷¹ In Tönnies' view, this shift of emphasis would have momentous consequences for the conception and functions of the individual in the modern world:

The natural, underlying constitution of civilization (though now lost to us) is communistic, while the contemporary and developing constitution of the future is socialistic . . . there is no *individualism* in history and civilization, except of the kind that flows from *Gemeinschaft* and remains conditioned by it, or else of the kind that gives rise to and sustains *Gesellschaft*. These opposing relationships of individual man to mankind in general are the very heart of the matter.⁷²

Like the contemporary sociologist Max Weber, Tönnies perceived that any age would manifest aspects of each of these elements ('the essence of both *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* is found interwoven in all kinds of associations').⁷³ But both thinkers lent support to a more widely held view of the time, signalled by a chapter title in Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), that the period of the Renaissance and of the Protestant Reformation had been the defining moment of 'the development of the individual'.⁷⁴ Since the nineteenth century, the sense that individualism and self-interest are trademarks of the modern condition has continued to motivate and to inform historical enquiry into guilds, which have been widely identified, by contrast, as embodiments—whether viewed in a positive or a negative light—of a collective principle.

⁷¹ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* [1887], transl. as *Community and Civil Society*, ed. José Harris and Margaret Hollis (Cambridge, 2001), 19.

⁷² Tönnies, preface to the first edition of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, transl. in *Community and Civil Society*, 13.

⁷³ Tönnies made this statement in an essay reproduced in Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Association* (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*), transl. C. P. Loomis (London, repr. 1974), 18. Weber's recognition that different social forms coexisted with one another is also emphasized by Oexle, 'Les groupes sociaux du moyen âge'.

⁷⁴ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* [1860], transl. S. G. C. Middlemore (London, 1878), part II, 'The Development of the Individual'.

A controversial and significant figure in German historical writing at the end of the nineteenth century was Karl Lamprecht, who developed his ideas about social movements and cultural evolution in deliberate opposition to the individualistic emphasis on the role of 'great men' of the past, most famously associated with Leopold von Ranke. Lamprecht organized his vast *Deutsche Geschichte* (1856–1915) around what he described as 'the gathering of social circles' over time, from the family, through guilds and other social and cultural groupings, to the state and the nation in his own day.⁷⁵ Naturally this resulted in a very different picture of the modern state from one based on the Rankean notion that political structures were always to be understood as the creation of outstanding individuals. In Lamprecht's view, the basic building-blocks of historical societies were group identities (which he called 'soziale Gruppen-individuen': 'individual social groups').⁷⁶ As he developed his historical ideas, Lamprecht corresponded with Otto Gierke, whose own history of German legal culture presented evidence for the existence and potency of group identities in the medieval past, which Gierke believed were in the process of an important revival in the present:

The ancient German idea of fellowship [is] newborn, bringing forth an incalculable wealth of new forms of community and giving new substance to the old. It is taking part in the transformation of the German community [*Gemeinde*] and state, which have only achieved progress in the past and will only advance in the future by means of a return to the root of fellowship. This alone is creator of a free form of association, becoming involved in and transforming all areas of public and private life; and, although it has already achieved great things, it will achieve even more in the near and distant future.⁷⁷

With Gierke, Lamprecht envisaged the state as composed of multiple groups, vital intermediaries between the individual and the larger unity. Of British readers of this literature, it was Bernard Bosanquet who, in *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (1899), most readily and explicitly embraced its Hegelian vision of the state as diverse in its elements yet a fully integrated whole.⁷⁸ Otherwise, the British reception of Gierke, in particular, tended to reject the Idealism of this German concept of the unified state, while fastening upon its account of pluralism. In the introduction to his English translation of part of Gierke's work, published in 1900, the legal historian Frederic William Maitland pragmatically refuted the opponents of corporations, who questioned their right to be set up by claiming that they were no more than legal fictions.

⁷⁵ Karl Lamprecht, *Deutsche Geschichte*, 12 vols (Berlin, 1856–1915).

⁷⁶ See further on Lamprecht Karl J. Weintraub, *Visions of Culture* (Chicago and London, 1966), 163 ff.; and Roger Chickering, *Karl Lamprecht: A German Academic Life (1856–1915)* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1993).

⁷⁷ Gierke, ed. Black, *Community in Historical Perspective*, 12.

⁷⁸ Bernard Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (London, 1899).

Maitland cited empirical evidence both from the present and from history which demonstrated the solid existence of guilds and many other voluntary associations.⁷⁹ Another historian who had been introduced to Gierke's work by Maitland was John Neville Figgis. In a work of 1907 Figgis, echoing Maitland, wrote:

What is needed nowadays is that as against an abstract and unreal theory of state omnipotence on the one hand and artificial views of individual independence on the other, the facts of the world with its innumerable bonds of association and the naturalness of social authority should be generally recognised, and should become the basis of our laws, as it is of our life.⁸⁰

Figgis was one of a miscellaneous group of thinkers whose vision of society was shaped by their particular (in his case, Anglo-Catholic) religious perspective. The need, as they perceived it, to protect the independent field of action of diverse Churches was, as Figgis's *Churches in the Modern State* (1913) made clear, a catalyst of their general theory of a composite, rather than a monolithic society.⁸¹ It was their Christianity, also, that led these British thinkers to criticize what they saw as Gierke's absorption of the individual within the group, which they felt to be wrong because it tended to leave the single member without a sense of personal and moral responsibility. From a different perspective, the libertarian socialist G. D. H. Cole shared this group's general suspicion of the state. In his *Social Theory* (1920), Cole tried to construct a political theory based on the life of the group. Although Cole's guild socialism originated before the First World War, it was strengthened by what he saw as particular wartime instances of state oppression.⁸² The War, indeed, radicalized many of these views, in one direction or the other. In Germany, Tönnies' move in the later part of his life (he died in 1936) towards support for an all-powerful national socialist state was not a natural development of his views in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887) but was triggered by his own perception, in the light of the War, of the need for strong government.

If Tönnies ultimately found himself compromising with a regime which would allow little space to voluntary or autonomous communities, on the other hand the problem faced by the British pluralists was that of how to regulate the interaction of multiple groups (a measure of local variation which

⁷⁹ Gierke, transl. and ed. Maitland, *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, introduction.

⁸⁰ John Neville Figgis, *From Gerson to Grotius* (Cambridge, 1907), 206.

⁸¹ John Neville Figgis, *Churches in the Modern State* (London, 1913). See further David Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State* (Cambridge, 1997), 134–5; Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford, 2004), esp. pp. 70–2.

⁸² G. D. H. Cole, *Social Theory* (London, 1920). See further Anthony W. Wright, 'Guild socialism revisited', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9 (1974), 165–80; Runciman, *Pluralism*, 165 ff.

had always been especially characteristic of the British state) without invoking a supreme state power. Ernest Barker could praise

clubs, tutorial classes, trade unions, community associations on the new municipal housing estates, village institutes, churches and chapels and the various social groups that spring up around churches and chapels—all that rich growth of voluntary associations which is part of our lives as much as the state, and which can prepare us by its experience for the life of the state.⁸³

Yet Barker, who as early as 1915 had published an article entitled ‘The discredited state’, never managed to explain how, if many flowers were to be allowed to bloom, the inevitable stress and competition between the plants were to be managed, if not by a transcendent state.⁸⁴ This would continue to be a matter of urgent debate.

THE LIMITS OF COMMUNITY

The problem, from a pluralist viewpoint, was even more serious than this. In 1934, upon Hitler’s accession to power, Barker was impelled to observe: ‘it is the philosophy of the Group which is the ultimate threat to liberty today, as that threat confronts us in Europe.’ Once Gierke’s idea of the essential reality of the group had been appropriated to serve a national socialist ideology, it appeared that it could lead to the very absolutism against which it had previously been conceived as a check. The contemporary critic who observed with greatest clarity the destructive potential of all communal ideologies was Helmuth Plessner. Plessner’s *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* appeared first in German in 1924.⁸⁵ In prophetic tones, Plessner warned: ‘The idol of this age is community.’⁸⁶ He recognized that appeals to communal values in *Gemeinschaft*, whether expressed as national identity based on ‘blood kinship’ or as social fraternity conceived as a ‘brotherhood of love’, were in practical terms unrealizable, but were driven by an ideological

⁸³ Ernest Barker, *Education for Citizenship* (Oxford, 1936), 12, cit. Grimley, *Citizenship*, 91–2.

⁸⁴ Ernest Barker, ‘The discredited state’, *Political Quarterly*, original series, 5 (1915), 101–21; and see Julia Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics: The Social and Political Thought of Ernest Barker* (Cambridge, 1994).

⁸⁵ Helmuth Plessner, *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft. Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus* [1924], transl. Andrew Wallace as *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* (New York, 1999). Plessner (who died in 1985) has continued to be an influential figure in German thought, especially for his development, with Max Scheler, of philosophical anthropology. But he has been little discussed elsewhere. The American translator of *The Limits of Community* could write in 1999: ‘Helmuth Plessner is virtually unknown to an English-speaking audience’ (p. 1). This work was translated into Italian at the same period: Bruno Accarino, ed., *I limiti della comunità. Per una critica del radicalismo sociale* (Bari, 2001).

⁸⁶ Plessner, *Limits of Community*, 65.

extremism which could be no less destructive of humanity than the ills which they denounced. He saw the rhetorical appeal of collectivism, which at the period in which he was writing was by no means confined to Germany, as a threat, not merely to the external political or economic rights of the individual, but to a vital yet fragile part of the human psyche:

The individual is threatened by ideologically surrendering his legitimate claim to distance between persons, a surrender that provides support for the ideal of a communal dissolution within an all encompassing organic connection.⁸⁷

Although he insisted that every man and woman was unique, Plessner's critique of community did not make him an individualist.⁸⁸ His starting point was, rather, an anthropological perception that a human being is always in a delicate balance between complementary aspects: an extrovert, sociable, and public persona on the one hand, and on the other a modest, discreet, and private character. Human beings want to be recognized for what they are, yet they also feel the need to veil a part of their identity from complete exposure to others. The necessary relationship between these two aspects of humanity is realized, so Plessner argued, in a continual oscillation between engagement and withdrawal. Only a measure of civil interaction with others in the arena of the public sphere can enable us to acquire a personality, which is created for the benefit and affirmed by the esteem and approbation of others. But the particular identity of the person will always tend to be kept secret:

The dual character of psychological being pushes towards and, at the same time, pushes away from being fixed and determined. We want ourselves to be seen and to have been seen as we are; and we want just as much to veil ourselves and remain unknown, for behind every determination of our being lies dormant the unspoken possibility of being different.⁸⁹

Since it was therefore natural, in Plessner's view, that life should be in a constant condition of flux, it was equally impossible that it should ever be resolved into the absolute terms of a radical and binary ideology such as either 'community' (*Gemeinschaft*) or 'individualism' (associated with *Gesellschaft*).

⁸⁷ Plessner, *Limits of Community*, 66. See also p. 104: 'the person pays to enter the community with the coin of his individual personality.'

⁸⁸ The appearance of the American edition of the book (see n. 85 to this chapter) in 1999 was not accidental. Its translator presented it as a vindication of a convention-governed social sphere which could protect the autonomy and freedom of the individual: '[Plessner's] discussion of the nature of artifice, of the curative benefits of a socially constructed persona, represents a counter-note to the impassioned plea for community and authenticity that rings throughout contemporary political debates' (translator's note, pp. 30–1). There is an implied reference here to the work on both community and authenticity by Charles Taylor, on whom see later. But in fact Plessner's principal argument was precisely against this binary distinction: he urged that the ambiguity of the human psyche required that such dualism be rejected and transcended. *Limits of Community*, 109–11, 147, and *passim*.

⁸⁹ *Limits of Community*, 109.

Plessner's anthropological argument is of enormous importance for its break with the Manichean opposition between the reified ideals of *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*. Concerned though he was to warn against the dissolving power of an excess of community, his account of the balancing merits of civil society as the supportive home of the embodied human being (where 'forced distance between persons becomes ennobled into reserve'⁹⁰) was offered not as an alternative but as a complement to the more intimate sphere of the mind and soul. We should not aspire, this argument holds, to make an impossible choice between these ideological extremes, each of which, alone, is either inadequate or destructive to human life. What we need to do, rather, is to understand better the required relationship between the complementary aspects of our make-up as human beings. As Herder had already emphasized, the human being comes into the world too ill-equipped to survive alone or to enjoy life as a given. The solitary individual is doomed. Unlike other animals, he or she is impelled to turn outwards, in order to create the conditions of life through interaction with others. The effect of this external engagement with others is a measure of detachment from the interior identity of the individual, as she or he develops a modified persona through interaction in community. It is from this new perspective that—again unlike other animals—the human subject can see their identity objectified: indeed, only through this effect of distancing can we know ourselves. The necessity of socialization to the fulfilment of the individual had been emphasized already by Aristotle, and is summarized in the words of his modern disciple, the Dominican theologian Herbert McCabe:

It is the child who has been welcomed into the society of her family and friends, and encouraged to play a full part in it, who is able to be herself and be free. She has acquired the self-confidence and self-acceptance that comes of being accepted by others. And so it is at every level: it is by being parts that we are wholes. Community and individuality are not rivals.⁹¹

Yet here is the rub. To engage with society is to embrace an identity given by society, and so to begin to suppress one's distinct and individual self, with the result that in order to preserve the latter, one is driven back to the internal pole. With every act by which we engage with the world, and through which we create a recognizable identity for ourselves, we put at risk the unique particularity of our own self.

⁹⁰ *Limits of Community*, 131.

⁹¹ Herbert McCabe, *The Good Life* (London, 2005), 28.

CONTACT AND IMMUNIZATION

The modern political philosopher Roberto Esposito, elaborating both the Aristotelian and the Plessnerian positions, has described this oscillating process as one of immunization: to preserve the body, the individual opens himself or herself, to a limited degree, to the influence of others, embracing contact with an alien and potentially harmful element, without a strengthening injection of which survival would be impossible. Esposito follows Plessner in seeing human survival as dependent upon a to-and-fro motion between interior subjectivity and exterior objectification of the self. The life-force with which the individual enters the world is a potential energy which, if unchecked, would overflow into an excess of violent and destructive emotion. The persona which is therefore crystallized for social use (the word 'persona' still conveys something of its Latin meaning: 'mask') is a vital means whereby the individual can acquire an acceptable public identity and at the same time gain a new perspective from which to perceive his or her other, interior personality. This is an argument which acknowledges but reaches beyond the position of Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, which described human life as a succession of dramatic acts, in which individuals try out various roles and costumes, and learn to play their parts. For our own peace of mind, in Goffman's account, we do our utmost to convince both ourselves and those around us that the part we have adopted is our true identity.⁹² Esposito, by contrast, understands the artificial construction of a social self to be part of a more complex process of identity construction and preservation. On this argument, individual identity needs protection from a dissolving excess of exposure, either to the impersonal radicalism of community or to the restrictive norms and conventions of society—and yet at the same time, it has no chance of realization except through engagement with others:

human life can only last by projecting itself outside itself, into something external that blocks it and ultimately negates it. Without this externality that objectifies life in ways that are perhaps different from its simple being, from its immediate presence, life cannot survive itself. To survive implies controlling the vital force, which inevitably winds up reducing its intensity. The vital force does not spring freely from the flow of life, or even from the spontaneous combination of its elements, but rather, from its solidification in cages, which restrains and curbs it to the point of driving it into the presence of its opposite. The identification of

⁹² Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY, 1959). In David Gary Shaw, *Necessary Conjunctions: The Social Self in Medieval England* (New York, 2005), Goffman's thesis is applied to the mercantile elite of the late-medieval cathedral town of Wells. The one-dimensional picture of social posturing which results from such a study reveals the limitations of the social-anthropological model on which it is based.

man, in short, the preservation of his identity, is one with his alienation. He is able to remain subject only if he is capable of objectifying himself in something other than himself: to submit himself to something that deprives him of his subjectivity or substitutes for it.⁹³

A human life by itself is incapable of survival: its single chance is to open up to a contaminating encounter with others, modifying itself in the process. Injected with this extraneous element, the same life enjoys immunity from the threat of an overpowering irruption of the outsider, and can establish a *modus vivendi* both with others and with itself.

SOCIAL ETHICS

Drawing upon these ideas, this book takes as its point of departure the need to move beyond essentialized notions of ‘community’ or ‘the individual’, and to explore, instead, in a particular historical context, the dynamic of their inter-relationship. Helmuth Plessner has alerted us to the destructive potential of communitarian ideologies, while proposing an anthropological description of human life as a process of oscillation between interior and exterior modes of being. Introducing into Plessner’s account the metaphor of immunization, Roberto Esposito has proposed a fuller understanding of what the individual stands to gain by a controlled engagement with and partial reabsorption of the alien world outside. Both thinkers have contributed to a reconsideration of the very nature and limits of individuality in the human species. Their conclusions throw into question the very category of the self-contained person. In recent years liberal assumptions have come under attack from diverse sources for their prioritization of the discrete, atomized individual, at the expense of relational qualities formed through interaction with others in human communities. Heidegger has been recalled for his existential and anthropological observations that we come into a world already inhabited, and that our consciousness and identity as human beings are defined by the care with which we relate to our environment and to others: the *Mit-Dasein*, or being-with.⁹⁴ Complementary insights have come from the phenomenological studies of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty and their followers, who have re-emphasized an older, pre-Cartesian conviction that the mind is not separated from the body and that our knowledge of the world is derived from

⁹³ Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* [2002], transl. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge, 2011), 84–5.

⁹⁴ Dorothea Frede, ‘The question of being’, in Charles B. Guignon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge, 2006), 42–69.

contact with our environment and with one another.⁹⁵ Self-awareness is always responsive to a given situation: I am conscious of myself as a body unfolding in a world with other people. Psychological studies of children have demonstrated that identity is constituted from the outset through communication (and is correspondingly affected by its absence): it is a way of relating to others.⁹⁶ We are not alone.

The liberal assumption of the fundamentally individuated self has been further challenged by the communitarian arguments of Charles Taylor. Taylor has taken it to be axiomatic that we are inescapably implicated in a world with other people, facing questions which are unavoidably moral. In this sense we are bound together. But his argument in *Sources of the Self* (1989) did not depart from an underlying acceptance of individual autonomy: his communitarian case was that community offers a suitable environment within which the individual can develop his or her self on the basis of a common understanding with others.⁹⁷ In his more recent summation of his views, *A Secular Age* (2007), Taylor has reinforced his critique of modern Western ideas of individualism. Yet 'the individual' remains at the heart of his account of how modernity in the West has been marked by personal isolation. He sees the 'buffered self' of modern Western man as the unhappy successor to the potentially open, 'porous self' of pre-modernity.⁹⁸ With respect to his understanding of social relationships, this distinction proposed by Taylor echoes a debate amongst late twentieth-century anthropologists who, critiquing individualistic assumptions, discussed whether human cultures might be differentiated by the prevalence of one or other of the conceptual models of 'individuals' or of 'dividuals'—the latter being understood as people who were relatively open, flexible, and collaborative.⁹⁹ In a further contribution to the discussion, Jerrold Seigel, notwithstanding the fact that his *Idea of the Self* underlines our dependence upon interaction with others, privileges in conclusion not a consequent blurring of the boundaries of the self, but a reflective self-recognition which, in his account, tends to reinforce the image of contained individuality.¹⁰⁰ These analyses underestimate the philosophical

⁹⁵ Robert J. Dostal, 'Time and phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger', in Guignon, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 141–69; Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Basic Writings*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (London and New York, 2004). Husserl taught Plessner, whose writing in turn influenced Merleau-Ponty.

⁹⁶ D. W. Winnicott, *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* (Harmondsworth, 1964); Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London, 1989).

⁹⁷ Charles Taylor, 'Atomism', in his *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, 1985), 187–210; Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989).

⁹⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

⁹⁹ The debate is reviewed and critiqued by Karl Smith, 'From dividual and individual selves to porous subjects', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 23 (2012), 50–64.

¹⁰⁰ Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 2005).

and moral significance, within particular historical contexts, of a perceived creative tension between different ideas of identity; and they return ultimately to a presumed norm of individual personhood.

In more radical mode are those who have challenged at its core the Enlightenment myth of the transcendent, rational, autonomous, and normally masculine subject: an extremely powerful myth which has been fundamental to liberal thinking over the past two centuries. Rational thought, in this perspective, tends to close in complacently on itself, and to exclude all forms of communication and relationship which are inter-subjective, emotional, non-rational, feminine, or bodily. The fact that these assumptions are deeply embedded obscures the historically and culturally situated nature of the concepts of personality and identity upon which they are based. A powerful exponent of such a critique has been Saba Mahmood, whose work on Muslim women in contemporary Egypt has led her to question the liberal Western assumption that human behaviour should be universally judged according to the degree of independent agency wielded by the supposedly autonomous individual.¹⁰¹ Agency, as Mahmood points out, is not necessarily or always a matter of independent judgement and action. Nor, contrary to neoliberal assumptions, does the social status of the subaltern render creative activity impossible. Michel Foucault urged us to recognize that there could be no agency that was not shaped by the norms of surrounding society; yet he emphasized the importance, in the establishment of a relationship to those norms, of the personal exercise of particular techniques and practices which help to form the ethical subject.¹⁰² In diverse historical cultures, as Foucault showed from classical and medieval examples, the work required by these practices has been understood as the means by which people are able to construct themselves as moral human beings. Focusing in particular on the new regime of spiritual self-examination in confession brought in by the Lateran Council of 1215, Foucault dated to the thirteenth century the beginning of modern techniques of the self.¹⁰³ This (as is often the case with Foucault's chronology) is too sweeping a claim; but the significant point is his identification of culturally specific ethical practices of self-formation. With Foucault's argument in mind, Mahmood has urged that, rather than prejudging a given political order on the basis of its hierarchical structure, we should pay close attention to the possibilities, within that order, for human interaction and ethical growth. We may wish, in another forum, to denounce

¹⁰¹ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, 2005).

¹⁰² For an indication of Foucault's argument, see his 'Technologies of the self', in Michel Foucault, *Ethics*, vol. i, *Subjectivity and Truth*, transl. R. Hurley and others, ed. Paul Rainbow (London, 1997), 223–51.

¹⁰³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. ii, *The Use of Pleasure*, transl. R. Hurley (Harmondsworth, 1986), 58.

injustice or inequality. But without passing judgement on the norms which prevail in a particular culture, we have much to learn from the ways in which those norms are inhabited by its members. With particular reference to the women's mosque movement in Cairo, which emerged in the context of the Islamic Revival in the late 1970s, Mahmood emphasizes that this has been concerned to educate people in virtues, ethical capacities, and modes of reasoning which 'participants perceive to have become either unavailable or irrelevant to the lives of ordinary Muslims'.¹⁰⁴ Virtue, in this environment, is not the consequence of subscription to a body of moral doctrine, but is a gradually acquired pattern of daily and persistent practice with respect to habits of dress, modesty, and interaction with others. This last aspect is crucial, for each member of the group understands herself to be formed in and through an ethical relationship with those around her. Techniques of moral behaviour are understood in this context not as the outward signs of a pre-existing interior spiritual commitment, but as the practical means by which the women work collaboratively to foster moral qualities and ethical growth. One, taking her turn as a teacher in the mosque school, pronounces:

What we have to do is to educate Muslim women that it is not enough to wear the veil, but that the veil must also lead us to behave in a truly modest manner in our daily lives.¹⁰⁵

Similarly, the pious technique of weeping during prayer is first learned and practised within the women's groups, before it becomes, over time, internalized and naturalized as integral to the ethical subject.¹⁰⁶ The case shows how a culturally conditioned and conditioning environment—what Pierre Bourdieu termed a *habitus*¹⁰⁷—may be modified and renewed, not by individuals acting alone but through the collective agency of regular and repetitious practice by the group.

The Islamic culture of modern Cairo is in some respects far removed from that of the Christian society of late-medieval England. Yet the insights which Saba Mahmood has drawn from her study have light to shed also on that other world which is the subject of this book. In that earlier context, as in present-day Islamic society, dominant religious and political structures determined the codes of social and ethical behaviour within which men and women grew and lived their lives. Yet as in Islam in the 1970s, so also in later medieval Christian Europe, a perception that modernization threatened to render the central values of religion marginalized or redundant provoked groups of lay people, by the formation of guilds, to reconsider how those values might continue to be cultivated in a changing environment. These guild members, too,

¹⁰⁴ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 50–1.

¹⁰⁶ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 129 ff.

¹⁰⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, transl. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1990).

understood ethics to be a matter, not of personal 'belief' or of mere conformity to socially agreed norms, but of a deliberately fostered and collaborative practice. And by their collective cultivation of models of mutual friendship, hospitality, charity, and commemoration, they likewise proposed to their neighbours in a larger social context a particular mode of living the precepts of the common religious tradition.

To make this argument about the medieval guilds is implicitly to critique the still influential thesis of the sociologist Norbert Elias, according to whom the roots of the modern social values—where they survive—of courtesy, self-restraint, and mutual respect are to be traced to the court societies of early modern Europe.¹⁰⁸ In what follows it will be seen how far these values had their origins in the earlier and very different social and religious environment of the guilds. Participation in a guild created a breach in the boundary of the self: it privileged interpersonal relationships above individual interest, and enabled forms and levels of collective agency denied to the singular person. As ensuing sections of this book will show, the guilds contributed to a contemporary debate surrounding these issues. Medieval people were aware that 'community' was no easy goal, and that much stood in the way of its realization. Use of this term by medieval historians has been criticized for its naïvety, in so far as scholars have occasionally invoked an idealized notion of togetherness as though this offered an explanation rather than presenting a problem.¹⁰⁹ This book documents the ways in which participants in the medieval guilds, recognizing the complexity of the problem, debated and engaged with the moral and practical challenges of addressing it. The final chapter will propose an understanding of the term 'community' which liberates it from the reified and often romanticized definition familiar from 'community studies'.

Better understood, medieval discussions of the nature of the self and of the interactive processes by which society might be constructed have still something to teach us. Amongst recent philosophers with an interest in the problem of selfhood, there have been a number who have invoked, as a relevant case of transcendence of the self, the Catholic tradition of mysticism.¹¹⁰ This has proved a fruitful point of reference, both as a documented historical phenomenon and as a model for a way of talking about the

¹⁰⁸ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* [1939], transl. Edmund Jephcott, 2 vols (Oxford, 1978–82). A recent instance of homage paid to Elias is Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (London, 2012).

¹⁰⁹ Loose and idealizing usage of the term 'community' understandably came to be seen by the late 20th century as neo-Romantic and unhistorical. For criticism of that usage, see Miri Rubin, 'Small groups: identity and solidarity in the late Middle Ages', in Jenny Kermode, ed., *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England* (Dover, NH, 1991), 132–50; Christine Carpenter, 'Gentry and community in medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), 340–80.

¹¹⁰ Of particular value are Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, vol. i, *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* [1982], transl. Michael B. Smith (Chicago and London, 1992); and Ben Morgan, *On Becoming God: Late Medieval Mysticism and the Modern Western Self* (New York, 2013).

transcendent or the divine, understood not as a personal god but as a power that is perceived to be greater than the individual and yet which cannot satisfactorily be reduced to the forces of ideology or society. The following chapters offer a contribution to this discussion, by proposing that the medieval guilds were the less rarefied context of a no less significant process of potential self-transcendence. If this argument is correct, it has implications both for our picture of medieval society, and for how we see ourselves.

CONCLUSION

The starting point for this book is therefore the proposition that the medieval guild existed at a crucial point of encounter between the individual and the group, and indeed that membership in the association was understood as a vital means to negotiate that mutual exchange without which neither party could survive. Chapter 2 considers the fraternities as means whereby groups of Christian laity set about to cultivate an ethics of everyday life: a moral purpose directed at the spiritual salvation of the individual, yet unattainable without a collaborative dimension. The third chapter addresses the theme, prominent in the language of guild texts, of friendship. This is a remarkably little studied subject in the secular history of the Middle Ages, yet fragmentary evidence suggests that the fostering of friendship between members was a leading motive for participation in the guilds. The chapter which follows, on the feasts of the guilds, draws attention to the ways in which the lay members of the fraternities emulated in their own ceremonies the sacred rituals of the Church, appropriating to themselves concomitant honour and moral standing. The serious principle underlying the celebration of the feast was that the individual member, through participation in a communal rite which was redolent of the mass, would be spiritually enriched. Chapter 5 considers the vital importance of the creation of trust in the late-medieval world of work. The moral conditions of guild membership are considered as a basis of trust, and emphasis is laid on the diversity of fraternities in which an individual might, at different junctures in the cycle of his or her career, beneficially become inscribed. Without overlooking the many constraints which bore upon any craftsman or craftswoman, the ever-present potential to form a new guild, which could provide either a secret forum or a respectable public front for its members, complicated the politics of labour relations. The final chapter turns to an original meaning of the word 'community', to consider the activity of the guilds as the taking up of a shared responsibility, a perceived obligation to set personal interest aside in the interest of a common purpose. The book as a whole treats the construction of solidarity not as the unproblematic outcome of an idealized, natural community, but as a consciously pursued, frequently frustrated, and hard-won process of art.



Fig. 2 Alms houses, hall, and chapel of the guild of the Holy Cross, Stratford-upon-Avon, early fifteenth century. Photo: Malcolm Davies © Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

2

Ethics

We, being many, are one body in Christ,
and every one members one of another.

St Paul, Letter to the Romans, 12.5

THE GOOD LIFE FOR ALL

The proliferation of guilds during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was catalysed not only by social instability, but also by the emergence of a new ethical perspective. The thirteenth century opened a new chapter in the expression of Christian morality, which would have a direct and extensive bearing on the formation of the guilds. From the outset, the Christian conviction of individual salvation in the afterlife had problematized the ordering of social life in the world in a particular way. To the perennial human question, How should one live in the world? Christian theology appends an ironic twist. While every soul is an emanation of God, it retains throughout the life of the person it occupies, and for all eternity thereafter, its unique particularity and value. In this perspective, the primary importance of personal salvation in the afterlife could lead to the deprecation of other human beings living in the world as little more than useful means to private ends. Such a view was encouraged by no less authoritative a voice than St Augustine, who, increasingly dispirited at the practical difficulties facing the construction of the city of God on earth, came to see other people as part of the divine provision of 'useful goods' which were made available to the individual Christian as secondary aids to the pursuit of his or her personal salvation.¹ On the other hand, medieval and later Christians have also been heirs to a different model of life in the world: one based on a perception of difference and a principle of

¹ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St Augustine* (New Haven, 1980), 25 and *passim*.

mutuality. This is the model given in the twelfth chapter of St Paul's Letter to the Romans: 'we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office'.² Over the course of Christian history, diverse emphases have been given to these complementary aspects of the tradition. In that long process of evolution, the twelfth century marked a watershed of fresh thought about the collective body of the Church as the incarnation of divinity in the world. A new emphasis was given to the passage in St Matthew's gospel in which Christ gave his answer to the young man who kept the commandments and asked what more he should do to have eternal life: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.'³ The diffusion of this apostolic model of evangelical piety led to the recognition of new opportunities for lay men and women to lead religious careers in the world. Manifestations of the change were everywhere to be seen: in the formation of third orders which enabled lay men and women living in the world to participate in the spiritual programme of monastic communities; in the sanctification of knighthood; in the careers and social concerns of Valdès of Lyon and of St Francis; in the sermons of Honorius Augustodunensis addressed severally to the different classes of lay society; in the representations of artisanal crafts which took their place within the cosmic order in the windows of Chartres cathedral; and in the formation of guilds.⁴

In the men and women who responded to these examples and initiatives there operated, in particular, two motivating considerations which would continue to inform the later history of the guilds. One was a desire to emulate in a secular context the collaborative religious model of ethical living which was the monastic community. From the earliest Christian centuries, the monastic model had presented a twofold aspect. On the one hand, it was an ascetic choice to renounce mundane values, in order to conform the self more closely to Christ, as God in the world. In this sense, monastic life was introverted and individualistic. Yet at the same time, the discipline of obedience to a spiritual director and the renunciation of selfish desire were intended to enable and to foster love and compassion towards others. Monasticism provided an example of structured self-formation with the goal of reconciling

² Rom. 12.4–8.

³ Matt. 19.21. Cf. also Luke 10.1–12.

⁴ M. D. Chenu, 'Monks, canons and laymen in search of the apostolic life', in his *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, transl. and ed. J. Taylor and L. K. Little (Chicago and London, 1968), 202–38; M.-H. Vicaire, *L'imitation des apôtres: moines, chanoines et mendiants, IVe–XIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1963); Étienne Delaruelle, *La piété populaire au moyen âge* (Turin, 1975); Giles Constable, 'Renewal and reform in religious life: concepts and realities', in Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable, eds, *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1982), 37–67, esp. pp. 55–6; Alfred Haverkamp, 'Leben in Gemeinschaften: alte und neue Formen im 12. Jahrhundert' [1995], repr. in F. Burgard, L. Clemens, and M. Matheus, eds, *Gemeinden, Gemeinschaften und Kommunikationsformen im hohen und späten Mittelalter* (Trier, 2002), 207–36.

divided humanity.⁵ That example contributed a profound and enduring influence on the guilds. Affiliation with a monastery, the ability through confraternity to share in the spiritual benefits of the prayers and masses of the religious community, was an early and enduring aspiration of many among the laity, some of whom reworked that example in the foundation of lay guilds.⁶ A guild of *jongleurs* at Fécamp in Normandy, probably of early eleventh-century origins, enabled its members to share in the spiritual merits of the abbey of La Trinité, to which the society was attached.⁷ The standard phraseology used in grants to lay men and women of confraternity with monastic communities was echoed in the very wording of guild statutes, as in those of a guild of St Catherine in Bergamo recorded in 1279:

All the members of this *consortium* are participants in all of the alms and all of the good works undertaken in its name.⁸

The other widespread motive behind the creation of fraternities was a critical sense that the example of the Christian life held up by churchmen and political elites was debased, and in need of rejuvenation. The prominent role played in this pastoral reform initiative by the new mendicant orders helps to explain, in turn, the major involvement of the Dominicans and Franciscans in the promotion of new guild foundations in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.⁹ Like the young man who spoke with Christ, the lay participants in these diverse yet interrelated movements expressed a perception that a mute conformity with the law did not suffice to bring about a full conversion in the life of the individual. Only by acceptance of personal responsibility, leading to a practice of charity in daily intercourse with one's fellow human beings, could one begin to form oneself into something approaching the ideal of a moral Christian. The clear separation of the clerical *status*, which was a result of the Gregorian Reform of the Church in the twelfth century, contributed to the idea that the laity, also, was a distinct *status* or *ordo* with its own particular divine purpose.¹⁰ The new attitude is especially evident in the literature relating to penance, which was given enormous impetus by the decree of the

⁵ Alexis Torrance, 'Individuality and identity-formation in late antique monasticism', in Alexis Torrance and Johannes Zachhuber, eds, *Individuality in Late Antiquity* (Farnham, 2014), 111–27.

⁶ On fraternity with monastic communities in the early and high Middle Ages, see various essays in D. Geuenich and O. G. Oexle, eds, *Memoria in der Gesellschaft des Mittelalters* (Göttingen, 1994).

⁷ Catherine Vincent, *Des charités bien ordonnées: les confréries normandes de la fin du XIIIe siècle au début du XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1988), 85–8.

⁸ Lester K. Little, *Liberty, Charity, Fraternity: Lay Religious Confraternities at Bergamo in the Age of the Commune* (Northampton, MA, 1988), 153.

⁹ G. G. Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis. Confraternite e pietà dei laici nel medioevo*, 3 vols (Rome, 1977), gives many instances of mendicant promotion and patronage of guilds in this period.

¹⁰ Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis*, 216–45.

Lateran Council of 1215 imposing annual confession as a minimum upon all Christians. Manuals produced in the ensuing period for the use of confessors make it clear that lay men and women were now, as never before, being asked to take responsibility for their behaviour and for their reconciliation both with God and with the secular community through penance.¹¹ It was a presumption of this literature that it was no longer necessary to be a professed member of the clerical hierarchy to pursue a full Christian life in the world. The canon and bishop Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240) declared:

In my judgement, it is not only those who renounce the world and go into religion who are 'regulars', but all the faithful of Christ who serve the Lord under the gospel's rule and live by the orders of the single greatest abbot or Father of all.¹²

Or as the secular poet Dante would put it just after 1300, 'God does not require us to be professed save in heart.'¹³

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

The seedbed of the late-medieval guilds was watered by innovative developments in ethics. A new ethical literature, beginning with the *Ethics* of Peter Abelard (c.1139), the work which introduced the word to the Latin West, moved the focus from the consequences of actions to the actor's inward intentions, engaging with the secular world and stressing personal responsibility:

God thinks not of what is done but in what mind it may be done, and the merit or glory of the doer lies in the intention, not in the deed.¹⁴

Abelard's *Ethics*, which he also called *Know Thyself*, makes the point that a moral life is not one which conforms outwardly to the precepts of religion, but one in which the individual engages in a regular practice of self-questioning concerning his or her motives in quotidian social situations. Abelard's successors were able to refine this insight with the help both of a re-reading of Stoic philosophy mediated chiefly through the writings of Seneca and Cicero, and fresh study of the *Ethics* of Aristotle, the translation of which (from Arabic

¹¹ Cyrille Vogel, ed., *Le pécheur et la pénitence au moyen âge* (Paris, 1969); Martin Ohst, *Pflichtbeichte: Untersuchungen zum Busswesen im hohen und späten Mittelalter* (Tübingen, 1995); Peter Biller and Alastair J. Minnis, eds, *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages* (York, 1998).

¹² Jacques de Vitry, *Libri duo, quorum prior orientalis sive Hierosolymitanæ alter occidentalis historiae nomine inscribitur*, ed. F. Moschus [1597] (repr. Farnborough, 1971), 357, cit. Chenu, 'Monks, canons and laymen', 221–2.

¹³ Dante, *Convivio*, iv.28.9, transl. W. W. Jackson, *Dante's Convivio* (Oxford, 1909), 293.

¹⁴ Peter Abelard, *Ethics*, ed. D. E. Luscombe (Oxford, 1971), esp. pp. 28–9.

texts into Latin) began in the mid-twelfth century but was completed only in the 1240s. The reception of Aristotle's *Ethics* in the course of the thirteenth century by theologians, university lecturers, and preachers was both widespread and profound. The Stoics considered the individual as morally autonomous, actions being ethical in so far as they were right for the person in his or her naturally given circumstances. Aristotle, by contrast, attributed great importance to reciprocal relationships as means whereby the individual might develop morally over the course of his or her lifetime. Both traditions would continue to influence Christian thought: some of the scholastics who admired Aristotle read him through Augustine and the Stoics.¹⁵ But from the thirteenth century to the end of the Middle Ages the discussion of the ethics of everyday life in the world was particularly marked by an Aristotelian emphasis. On the basis of ideas worked out in the course of the thirteenth century, theologians of the fourteenth century developed a new pastoral programme to communicate the message to lay audiences.¹⁶ The close link throughout this period between academic theology and pastoral care in preaching and confession meant that newly developing ideas on ethics were soon diffused into the wider community.¹⁷

Two aspects of Aristotle's teaching resonated especially with contemporary currents. First was the stress upon the need, if a person wished to become virtuous, of habituation in virtue. The virtuous person does not appear in nature, or *ex nihilo*. Nor is he or she created by the mere performance of virtuous acts. *Ethos*, or habit, was the vital prerequisite:

Actions are called just or temperate when they are the sort that a just or temperate person would do. But the just and temperate person is not the one who [merely] does these actions, but the one who also does them in the way in which just or temperate people do them. It is right, then, to say that a person comes to be just from doing just actions and temperate from doing temperate actions; for no one has the least prospect of becoming good from failing to do them.¹⁸

On this argument the creation of virtuous people necessitated a crucial measure of artifice: he who would be good must begin by playing the role of a good man, until by personal engagement with the part, the quality can be really absorbed and internalized.

¹⁵ Bonnie Kent, *Virtues of the Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Later Thirteenth Century* (Washington, DC, 1995), 206–12, 246.

¹⁶ Jeremy Catto, 'Currents of religious thought and expression', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vi, ed. Michael Jones (Cambridge, 2008), 222–33.

¹⁷ M. W. F. Stone, 'The care of souls and "practical ethics"', in Robert Pasnan, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 2010), i. 517–35.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. and ed. T. Irwin, 2nd edn (Indianapolis, IN, 1999), 22 (II.4).

The second feature of Aristotle's argument about virtue which, no less decisively, embedded itself in Western thought at this time was his demonstration that personal virtue could only be developed in active communication with others:

The just person needs other people as partners and recipients of his just actions; and the same is true of the temperate person, the brave person, and each of the others.¹⁹

Beyond the need for others upon whom virtue was to be practised, Aristotle argued furthermore that where virtuous individuals were gathered together, the excellence (*aretē*) of each would be amplified, yielding a total greater than the sum of its parts.²⁰ Believing as he did that all forms of virtue were easier to practise in groups than alone, Aristotle declared that the community (which for him was the *polis*) was the only context capable of securing the life of virtue.²¹ Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and other readers of Aristotle in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries would incorporate these arguments into Christian thought. For Aquinas, as for Aristotle, goodness was not a state of being. Instead, it was an activity, a way of living in society. For a human being to be born at all, and brought up in a human way, requires some form of society. The child learns, and increases her own capabilities, through interaction with others. As the individual matures, her actions derive meaning from their social context. This was why Aristotle had declared, in the opening phrase of *Politics*, that man was 'naturally a political animal'. For both thinkers, the key to human life was communication, through which men and women could hone and refine their identities in conversation and shared actions.²² This concern with ethics neither as simple states of being nor as mere actions in their own right, but as a consciously adopted and evolving practice of daily life in society, corresponded closely with the renewed emphasis from c.1200 on the divine incarnation in Christ and on his life in the world. Inspired by the historical reality of that model, St Francis gave the emblematic and influential example of a material life transformed initially by a public and dramatic rejection of inherited principles, and thereafter by a daily renewed commitment to embody different values in active relationships of love and charity with other human beings.²³

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. and ed. Irwin, 164 (X.7).

²⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, transl. Jonathan Barnes and ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge, 1988), 66 (III.11). For an up-to-date analysis of Aristotle's position, see Daniela Cammack, 'Aristotle on the virtue of the multitude', *Political Theory*, 41 (2013), 175–202.

²¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. and ed. Irwin, 68 (V.1), 169 (X.9).

²² See Mary M. Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle and the Promise of the Common Good* (Cambridge, 2006), 85; also Matthew Kempshall, *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, 1999), esp. pp. 85–97.

²³ Thomas of Celano, *First Life of St Francis of Assisi*, transl. Christopher Stace (London, 2000).

The preachers and theologians took care, even as they articulated the virtuous benefits of life in community, not to compromise what they understood to be the supreme value, on earth, of the individual soul. Aquinas embraced Aristotle's statement that man was a political animal; yet he stopped short of agreeing that the state was a natural organism able to make claims upon the individual. The balance between communal and individual ideals in the late-medieval context was delicate, and we should not overlook powerful arguments in defence of personal judgement, which were also a feature of the period.²⁴ It was even claimed in the 1970s that the twelfth century witnessed 'the discovery of the individual'. However, the evidence cited in support of this idea was really the reverse side of the contemporary argument that selfhood had to be forged in relationships with others—in mutual support within the monastic community; in the confessional; in friendship; in literary and artistic communication.²⁵ Engagement with the ethics of Aristotle contributed to this view. An early embodiment of this new pastoral theology was the prominent Dominican preacher, Remigio de' Girolami, who at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries delivered forceful sermons to the citizens of Florence. As he urged the townspeople to collaborate in peace in order to foster the growth of virtue amongst them, Remigio invoked both the words of Christ reported by Matthew, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them', and Aristotle's observation that men have a greater capacity to think and to act when they are in the company of friends.²⁶

Against this background of ideas and preaching, groups of lay men and women began to form themselves into guilds, in far greater numbers than the relatively few indicated by sources from the preceding, Carolingian period. The historian must here admit to being partially reliant upon negative evidence: the absolute numbers of earlier guilds cannot be known from the available sources. The explosion of evidence from the middle of the thirteenth century is, however—even allowing for the multiplication of records consequent upon the general bureaucratic expansion of the period—strongly

²⁴ Cary J. Nederman, 'Individual autonomy', in *Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ii. 551–64.

²⁵ Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050–1200* (London, 1972); R.W. Southern, 'Medieval humanism', in his *Medieval Humanism* ((New York, 1970), 29–60. See also the convincing critique of this argument, which contextualizes it within a larger 12th-century framework: Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Did the twelfth century discover the individual?', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31 (1980), 1–17. Bynum lists many types of communal religious grouping and identity in the period, although she does not mention the guilds.

²⁶ Charles T. Davis, 'An early Florentine political theorist: Fra Remigio de' Girolami', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 104 (1960), 662–76; Kempshall, *Common Good*, 327 (Kempshall observes, however, that Remigio's communitarian position, like that of Aquinas, was not entirely aligned with Aristotle: p. 338); Matt. 18.20.

persuasive of a change at this time.²⁷ The declared purposes of the guilds were very various, and as later chapters in this book will indicate, included ends which could be described as pragmatically social, economic, or political. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of these goals may be characterized as ethical. This aspect of the guilds has not been given the emphasis it deserves by historians, who have tended to be concerned either with what they suppose to have been the economic significance of guild activity, or with what is too often reduced in modern accounts to a superficial description of their 'piety' and 'good works'. The guilds' religious intentions went deeper than their devotional and charitable observances, valuable in practical terms though these may have been in particular cases. They envisaged, rather, the creation of a social environment which would be conducive to the practice of Christian virtues in regular interaction between the members themselves and also with others. Because medieval guild statutes tend to rehearse familiar religious principles, such as the value of the mass, the desirability of peace, and the necessity of charity, there is a risk that the modern commentator will find them formulaic. But this is to miss their point, which was precisely to foster amongst guild members a keen sense of the real purchase of these principles—at risk also at that time of becoming banalized and disregarded—upon their own lives. The goal was not simply to give alms on a regular basis, but by making the giving of alms naturalized as a part of one's character, to enable the individual guild member to grow as an ethical member of the community.

RESPONDING TO CHANGE

The ubiquity of the medieval guilds has fostered a tendency to take their existence for granted, as though they were a deposit of a pre-existing 'culture of devotion': one manifestation amongst others of a generalized 'medieval piety'. On the contrary, every guild, however modest in scale, needs to be recognized as an original creation intended to fill a perceived void, its purposes including that of nurturing the ethical consciousness and identity of its members and of those around them. The broad pattern of the formation of guilds across the medieval centuries is itself an indicator that a leading motive for their establishment was to put in place a framework, seen to be otherwise

²⁷ On the early guilds see especially Otto Gerhard Oexle, 'Gilden als soziale Gruppen in der Karolingerzeit', in H. Jankuhn, W. Janssen, R. Schmidt-Wiegand, and H. Tiefenbach, eds, *Das Handwerk in vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Zeit*, vol. i (Göttingen, 1981), 284–354; and for England in particular, Derek Keene, 'English urban guilds, c.900–1300: the purposes and politics of association', in Ian A. Gadd and Patrick Wallis, eds, *Guilds and Association in Europe, 900–1900* (London, 2006), 3–26; Gervase Rosser, 'The Anglo-Saxon guilds', in John Blair, ed., *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition 950–1200* (Oxford, 1988), 31–4.

lacking, for the cultivation of moral sensibility. The full extent of lay control over the medieval guilds has been partially obscured by the post-medieval experience of Catholic Europe, where from the later sixteenth century all confraternities came under increasing (if not always effective) pressure to submit to the direction of bishops and parish priests.²⁸ The situation in the preceding centuries had been quite different—so much so, indeed, that a parish priest in Toledo around 1550 voiced a widespread and growing clerical concern:

With so many brotherhoods, the laymen are in such firm control that they order the priests around as if they were day-labourers.²⁹

During the later Middle Ages, the clerical attitude towards this lay initiative had been broadly supportive, and in small numbers, clergy regularly appeared as members (but almost never as officers) of the guilds.³⁰ A German preacher at the end of the fifteenth century could even pay these groups the compliment that they had reintroduced something of the spirit of the first Christians: a spirit which had first been emulated by monastic communities, but which was now better expressed in the lay fraternities.³¹ However, sources before 1250 indicate what was at that time a more persistent tendency of the clergy to become jealously suspicious of lay men and women who undertook responsibility for fostering Christian ideals in the secular community. Our first evidence of medieval guilds, in fact, comes from clergy of the Carolingian period concerned to warn one another about their meetings. Alcuin of York wrote around 800 to two archbishops to share his concern about

²⁸ On the relationships between confraternities and parish clergy in the early-modern Catholic world, see Richard Mackenney, *Tradesmen and Traders: The World of the Guilds in Venice and Europe, c.1250-c.1650* (London, 1987), 60, 178–82; Vincent, *Des charités bien ordonnées*, 288; J.-P. Gutton, 'Confraternities, curés and communities in rural areas of the diocese of Lyons under the Ancien Régime', in K. von Greyerz, ed., *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe 1500–1800* (London, 1986), 202–11; and (with a qualification of the dominant trend of clerical control) Christopher Black and Pamela Gravestock, eds, *Early Modern Confraternities in Europe and the Americas: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Aldershot, 2006), 14–16.

²⁹ Maureen Flynn, *Sacred Charity: Confraternities and Social Welfare in Spain, 1400–1700* (Basingstoke, 1989), 117.

³⁰ In some areas at the end of the Middle Ages there were early signs of the imposition of clerical control which would become much more marked after the Catholic Reform of the mid-16th century. Charles de la Roncière, 'La place des confréries dans l'encadrement religieux du contado florentin: l'exemple de la Val d'Elsa', *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome: Moyen Âge, Temps Modernes*, 85 (1973), 31–77, at pp. 41–2; Catherine Vincent, 'La confrérie comme structure d'intégration: l'exemple de la Normandie', in *Le Mouvement confraternel au moyen âge: France, Italie, Suisse* (Rome, 1987), 111–31, at pp. 127–8. On the other hand, before the period of the Council of Trent, some Spanish guilds restricted the membership of priests in an explicit move to limit clerical control. Maureen Flynn, 'Rituals of solidarity in Castilian confraternities', *Renaissance and Reformation*, new series, 13 (1989), 53–68, at p. 62.

³¹ Gabriel Biel, *Sermones de Sanctis* (Tübingen, 1499), cit. Ludwig Remling, *Bruderschaften in Franken. Kirchen- und Sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Bruderschaftswesen* (Würzburg, 1986), 27.

those conventicles, in which the people are deceived, leaving the churches and seeking mountainous places, where they serve not with prayers but with drunkenness.³²

While ecclesiastical censure would continue for some centuries to take the guilds to task for their consumption of alcohol—of which indeed they were guilty, demonstrating in this, as well as in their oath-taking, their pagan roots—it is a reasonable inference that what most annoyed the early medieval clergy was these societies' wilful attitude to attendance at the central churches provided by authority, and indeed to respect for senior churchmen.³³ Alcuin's dark allusion to 'mountainous places' may have become a *topos* of the complaints, as much later, in the twelfth century, the courtier Walter Map described, in the context of a tale, the discovery in a wood of one of those 'drinking houses, called in English *ghildhus*', a scene of merriment and indulgence.³⁴ Characteristic of episcopal attempts at restraint in the early decades of the thirteenth century was an ordinance of the council at Worcester in 1240 which prohibited churchmen to attend 'immoral *gildales*, especially those frequented by merchants and pilgrims'.³⁵ In about the same year the archbishop of Bordeaux denounced all fraternities as 'an instrument against ecclesiastical liberties'.³⁶ In other parts of Europe the repetitive character of episcopal injunctions can be read as indicative both of the extent of this clerical anxiety and, at the same time, of the failure of ecclesiastical authority to impose effective regulations on the guilds.³⁷

More guilds were probably set up in towns than in the countryside; but in either instance, the metaphor of their seeking 'pagan' places may have often been apt. As population began, with increasing rapidity after the eleventh century, to grow and as urbanization gathered momentum, especially in southern and eastern England, the Low Countries, and northern Italy, pastoral provision was often at a premium. Demographic expansion rendered the shortfall of priests and churches acutely obvious in the very period, that of the Gregorian Reform of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, when reformers were calling for an increase both in quantity and in quality. A major pastoral dimension in the monastic reform taking place at this time generated

³² *Alcuini sive Albini Epistolae*, ed. E. Dümmler (Berlin, 1895), 448–9. In the second letter Alcuin notes that the members called their 'convents... sworn associations' (*conventus singulares, quos solent habere et nominant coniurationes*).

³³ Further instances of condemnation in Émile Coornaert, 'Les ghildes médiévales (Ve–XIVe siècles). Définition. Évolution', *Revue historique*, 199 (1948), 22–55, 208–43.

³⁴ Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, ed. M. R. James and others (Oxford, 1983), 154–8; Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, 76.

³⁵ *Councils and Synods, with other documents relating to the English Church*, ed. F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney, 2 vols (Oxford, 1964), ii, 313.

³⁶ Pierre Michaud-Quantin, *Universitas: expressions du mouvement communautaire dans le moyen-âge latin* (Paris, 1970), 188.

³⁷ Vincent, *Les charités bien ordonnées*, 101–2.

a marked increase in the participation of lay men and women, at all social levels, in fraternities associated with particular religious houses.³⁸ Canon law of the twelfth century, also related to the foundation of new monastic orders, generated a fresh discourse about the 'common life' which further contributed to the contemporary multiplication of confraternities.³⁹ On the other hand, some of the most vociferous lay critics of the failings of the Church at this time were groups, such as the Patarenes in Milan and other Italian cities, which earned clerical condemnation as heretical and yet themselves resembled guilds.⁴⁰ Their critical stance towards ecclesiastical authorities explains much of the criticism directed by bishops against fraternities in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.⁴¹ But at this time and for long afterwards, a central concern of the guilds was, in fact, to ensure better clerical provision, and to the extent that they could be harnessed as a means to resist heresy and support pastoral efforts, the Church gave them its blessing, once Pope Innocent IV had decreed in the mid-thirteenth century that—provided they showed respect for ecclesiastical authority—groups of artisans or professionals might freely associate in guilds as they wished.⁴² Already in the tenth century a guild at Exeter employed a mass priest for its services on three feast days in the year;⁴³ and around 1100 a guild of St Saturnin at Toulouse founded an altar within the newly rebuilt cathedral, the primary purpose of which was to provide masses for the souls of guild members, but which in practice also served the spiritual health of the city at large.⁴⁴ The construction of numerous churches, during this period of ecclesiastical expansion between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, was funded by guilds established for the purpose.⁴⁵

³⁸ Joachim Wollasch, 'Die mittelalterliche Lebensform der Verbrüderung', in K. Schmid and J. Wollasch, eds, *Memoria. Der geschichtliche Zeugniswert des liturgischen Gedenkens im Mittelalter* (Munich, 1984), 215–32, esp. pp. 224–7.

³⁹ Catherine Vincent, 'L'apport des confréries à la pratique du droit dans la société urbaine, à partir d'exemples français et italiens des XIIIe–XVe siècles', in Pierre Monnet and Otto Gerhard Oexle, eds, *Stadt und Recht im Mittelalter. La ville et le droit au Moyen Âge* (Göttingen, 2003), 97–115, at p. 101.

⁴⁰ Cinzio Violante, 'I laici nel movimento patarino', in his *Studi sulla cristianità medioevale: Società, istituzioni, spiritualità* (Milan, 1972), 145–246; Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus* (London, 1977), 40; Paolo Golinelli, *La Pataria. Lotte religiose e sociali nella Milano dell'XI secolo* (Milan, 1984), 45–7.

⁴¹ Jürgen Sydow, 'Fragen zu Gilde, Bruderschaft und Zunft im Lichte von Kirchenrecht und Kanonistik', in B. Schwineköper, ed., *Gilden und Zünfte. Kaufmännische und gewerbliche Genossenschaften im frühen und hohen Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen, 1985), 113–36, at pp. 116–17.

⁴² Meersmann, *Ordo fraternitatis*; Sydow, 'Fragen zu Gilde', 119–21.

⁴³ *English Historical Documents*, i., ed. Dorothy Whitelock, 2nd edn (London, 1996), 659–60.

⁴⁴ Monika Escher-Apsner, 'Dedes of charyte and to the common-welth. Bruderschaften und ihre baulichen und karitativen Beiträge zur *utilitas communis*', in Monika Escher-Apsner, ed., *Mittelalterliche Bruderschaften in europäischen Städten* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), 209–53, at pp. 216–17.

⁴⁵ Escher-Apsner, 'Dedes of charyte', 218–22.

Guild foundations in the later medieval centuries can be seen in similar terms as a practical and creative response to perceived inadequacies of clerical pastoral provision and the establishment, largely by lay initiative, of diverse contexts for the cultivation of ethical values. As a result of the reorganization of the Church during the thirteenth century, every man and woman in England, as in the rest of western Christendom, was assigned for his or her spiritual well-being to a parish church, and was supposed to know which one. The importance of the parish as a primary frame of reference for the lives of medieval people cannot be overstated.⁴⁶ Moreover, the parish had a communal dimension in its own right, which existed alongside and often in collaboration with that of the guilds.⁴⁷ But the parish was an unwieldy institution in the face of the ever-present medieval realities of social change and mobility.⁴⁸ The limited flexibility of its geographical bounds sometimes failed conspicuously to accommodate shifts in settlement. By 1300 the topographical definition of parishes had become largely fixed, yet the ensuing two centuries witnessed intensified and constant movements of both settlements and people. By the early sixteenth century demographic contraction attributable to the plague left a Kent parish with only a single parishioner.⁴⁹ On the other hand, early symptoms of demographic recovery beginning in the later fifteenth

⁴⁶ Beat Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community: The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish, c.1400–1560* (Aldershot, 1996); Katherine L. French, Gary G. Gibbs, and Beat A. Kümin, eds, *The Parish in English Life, 1400–1600* (Manchester, 1997); Katherine L. French, *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia, 2001); Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy, eds, *The Parish in Late Medieval England: Proceedings of the 2002 Harlaxton Symposium* (Donington, 2006).

⁴⁷ However, the suggestion advanced by Duffy that parochial membership was ‘not... uncomplicatedly all-inclusive’ (Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven and London, 1992), 153) is a little forced. While parishioners could differentiate themselves by their personal contributions, their fundamental status as such was not optional. For this reason it is also difficult to agree with the statement that ‘In many senses the parish was itself a fraternity, a point perhaps not usually given the emphasis it deserves’. Robert N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989), 280. The strongest claim for the autonomous power of the parish has been made by Kümin, *Shaping of a Community*, 52: ‘During the last medieval centuries, the English parish had been shaped by its members into a powerful community with considerable legislative, financial, and jurisdictional powers.’ This is, again, partly true, but overstated.

⁴⁸ Gervase Rosser, ‘Communities of parish and guild in the late Middle Ages’, in Susan Wright, ed., *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350–1750* (London, 1988), 29–55; Gervase Rosser, ‘Parochial conformity and voluntary religion in late-medieval England’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 1 (1991), 173–89. The distinction drawn here lies in the scope and character of the guilds, which were thus differentiated from the parish. It is an overstatement, however, to maintain that the guild was a virtually autonomous ‘alternative model of the Church’. Cf. Jacques Toussaert, *Le sentiment religieux en Flandre à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1963), 478; Fernand Lot and Robert Fawtier, eds, *Histoire des institutions françaises au Moyen Âge*, iii (Paris, 1962), 291; John Bossy, ‘The Counter-Reformation and the people of Catholic Europe’, *Past and Present*, 47 (1970), 51–70, at p. 63.

⁴⁹ *Kentish Visitations of Archbishop William Warham and his Deputies, 1511–1512*, ed. K. L. Wood-Legh, Kent Archaeological Society, Kent Records, 24 (1984), 96–7.

century created a challenge of a different kind, in a single suburban parish of the English metropolis crowded with upwards of 3,000 souls.⁵⁰ The defined boundaries of the parish had the further drawback that they ignored the fact of geographical mobility: commerce drew people to and fro across parish limits, creating supplementary pressures. The fifteenth-century moralizing text *Dives and Pauper* recognized that it would be hard for ‘messengers, pilgrims and wayfaring folk’ to attend regularly in their parish churches, but urged them ‘to hear mass and matins if they can’.⁵¹ The body which, unlike the parish, was able to give expression to these various movements was the guild. A fraternity at Northampton in the late fourteenth century arranged a dawn service for those departing the town early and another at mid-morning for those arriving from elsewhere.⁵² In 1401 a guild at Kidderminster in Worcestershire acquired a papal licence for its daily mass at dawn (*summo mane*), in order to overcome the active resistance, in this case, of the parochial vicar.⁵³ A similar guild at Thetford supported, again from common subscriptions, services in a chapel which was particularly frequented by visitors on market days or when law-courts were held there.⁵⁴ In an alternative configuration, also in the fourteenth century, a scattered band of shepherds in a district of Lincolnshire, prevented by the nature of their work from regular attendance at the parish church, could form a guild to ensure that candles burned for them there, both before the image of the Virgin Mary and, on feast days, at the elevation of the host in the mass.⁵⁵ The fluctuating exchange between a market town and its surrounding region would commonly find expression in the meetings of an urban-based fraternity. The Holy Cross guild of Stratford-upon-Avon at the end of the Middle Ages was supporting no fewer than five priests in the separate fraternity chapel in the town, which together with the parish church served a large area including seven outlying settlements.⁵⁶ Also typical in this respect was the guild of Corpus Christi, St Mary and All Saints founded in 1343 in the church of St Martin in Leicester. The brothers and sisters of this Leicester guild supported at first one and later two chaplains praying continually for their lay employers and for all Christian souls.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Gervase Rosser, *Medieval Westminster 1200–1540* (Oxford, 1989), 175–6.

⁵¹ *Dives and Pauper*, ed. Priscilla Heath Barnum, Early English Text Society, 275, 280, 323 (1976–2004), vol. 275, p. 290.

⁵² The National Archives (TNA): PRO C 47/45/383.

⁵³ *Calendar of Papal Registers, 1396–1401*, p. 411.

⁵⁴ TNA: PRO C 47/44/332; *Norfolk Archaeology*, 29 (1946), p. 205.

⁵⁵ TNA: PRO C 47/40/120: Holbeach (Lincs), 1389.

⁵⁶ Joshua Toulmin Smith and Lucy Toulmin Smith, eds, *English Gilds*, Early English Text Society, original series, 40 (1870), 221–2.

⁵⁷ TNA: PRO C 47/39/71.

At a conservative estimate, 30,000 guilds operated in England at some point between 1350 and 1550.⁵⁸ They were not, however, evenly distributed. The formation of guilds was by no means exclusively an urban phenomenon, but it was precipitated with particular frequency in towns, where growing populations, temporary visitors, and incoming settlers found an attractive point of reference in membership of one or another fraternity. The formation of a guild in such circumstances was a strategic means to create a measure of stability where other social coordinates were lacking. To the migrant worker, a stranger in a new town, there was a particular perceived value in joining a neighbourhood confraternity. There is a significant correlation, in fourteenth-century England, between personal mobility and the incidence of guilds: the most over-crowded and economically developed counties, between London and East Anglia, also recorded by far the greatest number of guild foundations at this period. Because of the probability that some of the returns to a national survey conducted into the guilds in 1388–9 have been lost, and catalogues of testamentary citations have been limited in their distribution, the evidence is not conclusive; yet the impression that fraternities burgeoned in the regions of the greatest personal displacement is both strong and suggestive.⁵⁹ Local studies have identified concentrations of late-medieval fraternities in the towns of Norfolk and Suffolk, and also in the more rural but densely populated Cambridgeshire fens.⁶⁰ Comparable evidence from other parts of Europe, where this survives, confirms the impression that recruitment to the guilds was especially dynamic in areas of marked demographic instability and amongst young migrants to the towns. In late-medieval France, ‘youth fraternities’ appear to have been ubiquitous, providing opportunities for young men and women aged between the mid-teens and late twenties to fraternize and potentially to acquire the social and moral reputation of good citizens.⁶¹ The Florentine company of San Paolo, a penitential flagellant confraternity, whose register survives for much of the fifteenth century, retained its members for an average of twenty years. This indicates a tendency for new recruits to be

⁵⁸ Evenly spread, this figure represents an average of three or four guilds in each of 8,000 or 9,000 parishes. Some urban parishes considerably exceeded this number.

⁵⁹ The returns are (incompletely) summarized in an appendix to Herbert F. Westlake, *The Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England* (London, 1919). See pp. 64–5 in the present study.

⁶⁰ Virginia Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside: Social and Religious Change in Cambridgeshire c.1350–1558* (Woodbridge, 1996), 28, 33 (350 fraternities were identified meeting in the county at some point between 1350 and 1558); Ken Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia, c.1470–1550* (York, 2001), 30–1 (1,200 guilds were recorded in Norfolk, and nearly 500 in Suffolk, between 1300 and 1550). A study of guilds in medieval Yorkshire also found them to be concentrated in centres of population. David J. F. Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power: Religious Gilds in Late Medieval Yorkshire 1389–1547* (York, 2000), 54–5.

⁶¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA, 1975), 75; Jacques Rossiaud, ‘Fraternités de jeunesse et niveaux de culture dans les villes du Sud-Est à la fin du Moyen Âge’, *Cahiers d’histoire*, 21 (1976), 67–102.

relatively young, a characteristic also borne out by the fact that in a single year (1480), about half of the 206 members were unmarried.⁶² A number of confraternities recorded in Italy were founded with the specific aim of nurturing the young, as a group perceived as both endowed with a natural virtue from which their elders could learn and especially vulnerable to the influence of vice.⁶³ Youth, independence, and a consequent sense of vulnerability were significant contributors to the formation of fraternities.

These diverse initiatives represented not a fragmentation of the parish into wholly independent local units, but rather a diversification and enrichment of opportunities to exercise a degree of choice and responsibility in religious behaviour.⁶⁴ The acquisition of ecclesiastical provision by the inhabitants of a settlement at a distance from the site of the parish church was not tantamount to a unilateral declaration of independence, but represented rather an extension of available options, usually by the elevation in status of some anciently venerated site. At Ripon in the 1370s, a guild was formed to reconstruct an 'ancient' chapel of St Mary, then believed to date from the time of St Wilfrid, which had since become ruinous.⁶⁵ A guild chapel might also be created as a direct offshoot of the parish church, as was the case in the Norfolk market town of Diss. Here the detached 'free chapel' of St Nicholas was the early fifteenth-century foundation of two town fraternities of St Nicholas and Corpus Christi, whose respective centres had previously been the north and south aisles of the parish church. Subsequently these guilds combined their resources to maintain both the chapel and a common guildhall for the town. At the same time, however, guild funds continued to be allocated to the parish church.⁶⁶ At Wisbech in Cambridgeshire the chapel of a popular fraternity contrived to form part of the parish church, whose holy site it shared and whose chancel it abutted, while at the same time stressing its distinct identity by having no door which communicated with the main building.⁶⁷ The relationship of these lay initiatives to mother churches tended to be complementary rather than competitive, their purpose being to enhance the secular stake in religious life.

⁶² Ronald Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1982), ch. 3.

⁶³ Nicholas Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna* (Cambridge, 1995), 21–3; Konrad Eisenbichler, *The Boys of the Archangel Raphael: A Youth Confraternity in Florence 1411–1785* (Toronto, 1998); Lorenzo Polizzotto, *Children of the Promise: The Confraternity of the Purification and the Socialization of Youths in Florence 1427–1785* (Oxford, 2004).

⁶⁴ Rosser, 'Communities of parish and guild'.

⁶⁵ TNA: PRO C 47/46/452 (a).

⁶⁶ Francis Blomefield, *An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, 2nd edn, 11 vols (London, 1805–10), i. 20, 32–3.

⁶⁷ *The Victoria History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely*, iv (London, 1953), 248; A. Nicholas, *St Peter and St Paul, Wisbech* (Wisbech, 1988), 5.

‘LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR’

The claim of the guilds to foster ‘good’ in the world was not always allowed by contemporaries to go unchallenged. Just as the rhetoric of ‘community’ in modern times is occasionally revealed to be a thin cover for the intolerance and exclusion of those perceived as ‘outsiders’, so too in the later medieval period critics of guilds pointed to what were sometimes seen as their self-serving, secretive, and subversive aspects. The published statutes of the guilds themselves on occasion acknowledged the force of some of these charges by their explicit refutation. In the words of a Swedish guild of the early fifteenth century:

Brothers and sisters, you should know that the banquet has been instituted not for drinking or greed, but for mutual support, assistance and friendship, and so that a brother should not refuse to help a brother in his need.⁶⁸

The oath sworn by members, to maintain the interests and preserve the secrets of the guild, was a perennial sticking-point with both ecclesiastical and secular authorities. The papal council of Avignon in 1326, while condoning the pious works of the confraternities, explicitly condemned them for requiring from members an oath of mutual protection, together with their related practice of issuing distinctive clothing and signs of membership.⁶⁹ Secular governments also were moved periodically to express concern or hostility towards the sworn secrecy of these bodies, starting with the Lombard rulers and continuing with the Carolingian.⁷⁰ The English royal inquiry into the guilds of 1388–9, triggered by parliamentary anxiety about security in the aftermath of the Peasants’ Revolt, is a further case in point.⁷¹

But criticism did not spring solely from the jealousy of established authority. On moral grounds, also, the ‘common good’ of the guild was intermittently denounced as the ill of the rest of society. About the end of the fourteenth century, an English follower of John Wyclif launched an attack on all guilds, denouncing precisely what he saw as their false claim to foster Christian goodness:

All new fraternities and guilds . . . conspire to bear up each other, yea, in wrong, and oppress other men in their right by their wit and power. And all the goodness that is in these guilds each man *ought* for to do by common fraternity of Christendom.⁷²

⁶⁸ Statutes of the guild of St Gertrude at Hällestad, Sweden, 1404, cit. Wilhelm Wilda, *Das Gildenwesen im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1831), 33–4.

⁶⁹ *Sacrorum Conciliorum . . . Collectio*, ed. J. D. Mansi, xxv (Venice, 1782), col. 763.

⁷⁰ Coornaert, ‘Les ghildes médiévales’; Otto Gerhard Oexle, ‘*Conjuratio* et *ghilde* dans l’antiquité et dans le haut moyen âge. Remarques sur la continuité des formes de la vie sociale’, *Francia*, 10 (1982), 1–19.

⁷¹ See pp. 64–5.

⁷² ‘The grete sentens of curs’, c. 28, in *John Wyclif: Select English Works*, ed. Thomas Arnold, 3 vols (Oxford, 1869–71), iii. 332–3 (c.1400). Vernacular works previously attributed to John Wyclif tend now to be assigned to followers.

Another Wycliffite sermon echoed the point:

Christian men should be lovers of brotherhood, not of brotherhood of friars nor of brotherhood of guilds, but of brotherhood in Christ and of Holy Church our mother. The men that make these sects work against Christ's brotherhood. Christ worked in many ways for the unity of this brotherhood, but these sects work hard to diversify it.⁷³

On this argument, the artificial and exclusive association of the guild, so far from appearing as a natural embodiment of the *bonum commune* or as a school of virtue, was actually opposed to genuine Christian brotherhood and to the common good of humanity.⁷⁴

This critique of the guilds emanated from a rhetorical tradition which emphasized notions of truth and sincerity that were free from artifice. Implicit in this view was an assumption that goodness was natural, and was not in need of sworn oaths, club liveries, or bonds of mutual aid to enable its effects to be felt throughout human society. At the same period, an analogous attack was levelled by a different writer at religious stage plays, on the ground that acting the parts of good Christians was no substitute for *being* virtuous:

No man may be converted to God but only by the earnest doing of God, and by no vain playing.

Acting, according to this moralist viewpoint, was no more than a pretence: 'feigned holiness'.⁷⁵ What was suspect in the guilds, therefore, was not only what some saw as the preferential and prejudicial treatment of their own members, but also the paraphernalia of initiation rituals, distinctive costumes, and paraliturgical ceremonies, which could be perceived as a hypocritical theatrical performance standing in the way of the real, inclusive 'common good' of Christian humanity.

On the other hand, this criticism of the artifice of the guilds and of the 'common good' which they enacted was itself open to question. For what, in the end, *was* 'the common fraternity of Christendom'? To attempt to naturalize brotherhood and the common good as though they were parts of the divine order may have been an instinctive gesture for some medieval moralists, although both scriptural history and empirical observation might

⁷³ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. Anne Hudson, 5 vols (Oxford, 1983–96), i. 626–7: syntax slightly adapted and spelling modernized (c.1380s–c.1410).

⁷⁴ The theme of the *bonum commune* is explored in Gervase Rosser, 'Guilds and confraternities: architects of unnatural community', in Élodie Lecuppre-Desjardin and Anne-Laure van Bruaene, eds, *De Bono Communi: The Discourse and Practice of the Common Good in the European City (13th–16th c.)* (Turnhout, 2010), 29–46, and in other essays in this collection.

⁷⁵ *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, ed. Clifford Davidson, rev. edn (Kalamazoo, MI, 1993), ll. 119–20, 313–14. Cf. Gervase Rosser, 'Roles in life: the drama of the medieval guilds', in Audrey Douglas and Sally-Beth MacLean, eds, *REED in Review: Essays in Celebration of the First Twenty-Five Years* (Toronto, 2006), 140–56.

have given them pause for thought. The Lollard texts just discussed express an optimistic belief in 'the brotherhood of man' which has found advocates in the Christian tradition both in and beyond the late Middle Ages. The injunction of the founder, however, had not been to embrace all mankind, but to 'love thy neighbour': a different, and a much harder task, as Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov knew:

'There's one thing I have to confess to you' began Ivan, 'I could never understand how one could love one's neighbour. In my opinion it's precisely those who are near to us that it is impossible to love, and one can love only those who are distant from us. I read something somewhere about a saint called "John the Merciful"; how on one occasion when a traveller, hungry and frozen, came to him and asked for warmth, he lay down with him in his bed, embraced him, and began to breathe into his mouth, which was purulent and stinking from some dreadful disease. I'm sure that he did so with a certain degree of hypocrisy, in response to a dutiful love, as a self-imposed penance. One can love a man only when he's out of sight; as soon as he shows his face, that's the end of love.'⁷⁶

To the discomfort of anyone who might feel as Karamazov does, Christ had been quite explicit on this point. In answer to the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' Christ had responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan, the moral of which was that one should embrace and help those whom one encountered in life.⁷⁷ Augustine had made the point in a very practical way:

All people should be loved equally. But you cannot do good to all people equally, so you should take particular thought for those who by the chance of place or time or anything else are, as if by lot, in particularly close contact with you.⁷⁸

A modern student of ethics has made the same pragmatic observation:

An ethic of undifferentiated love which allowed of no application to proximate relations could have little relevance for embodied human beings who can be in only one place at a time and must needs be closer to some people than others.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, transl. Ignat Avsey (Oxford [1994], 2008), 296–7. Again: 'The more I have detested people individually, the more passionately I have loved humanity in general' (p. 72). Cf. Matt. 22.39 ('Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'); John 13.34–5 ('A new commandment I give to you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another'); Rom. 13.8 ('love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law'); 1 John 13.23 ('And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment').

⁷⁷ Luke 10.29–37.

⁷⁸ Saint Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and transl. R. P. H. Green (Oxford, 1996), 38–9 (i.28). Cf. Gilbert Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN, 1981), 19.

⁷⁹ Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester, 1994), 240, cit. Gillian and Stephen R. L. Clark, 'Friendship in the Christian tradition',

The practical realization of this ethical ideal of love for one's neighbour calls for a difficult process of education, and a context in which what is learned can be practised until it is so far internalized that it becomes instinctive. The surviving records of the medieval guilds trace the attempt, within a local and face-to-face context of voluntary associations, to make these goals a reality: to rehearse and to perform charitable relationships which did not come naturally.

THE PRICE OF ENTRY

The primary purpose of association being understood in moral terms, the basic requirement of entry was a willingness to subscribe to shared ethical ideals. Postulants might be scrutinized for their existing worthiness of character, and an aspirant initiate might require the favour of the society's officers or even of the entire membership.⁸⁰ A new recruit to the fraternity of St Anne in the church of St Lawrence Jewry in London at the end of the fourteenth century was to be

of good fame by record of his neighbours, so that this company be not held for maintainers of wickedness.⁸¹

Blackballing was a possibility, and when this occurred in a Leicester guild the case was debated and decided on a majority vote.⁸² In pursuit of their aim to present both their own members and those around them with a challenging model of Christian living, the guilds sought to recruit men and women sympathetic to their ideals.

An index of voluntary commitment was the material contribution required from each member, either as a single down payment at entry or by subscription. The price of admission was typically low, commonly 3*d.* per quarter and even as little as 4*d.* a year in certain cases, or 'whatever the member could afford'. Among fourteenth-century London guilds, the commonest rate was between 1*s.* and 2*s.* a year, although both higher and lower charges are recorded.⁸³ To put these sums in context, a skilled craftsman around 1400

in Roy Porter and Sylvana Tomaselli, eds, *The Dialectics of Friendship* (London, 1989), 26–44, at p. 41.

⁸⁰ TNA: PRO C 47/46/454 (York guild of Paternoster); *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 8.

⁸¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS London Rolls, 2; printed in Caroline M. Barron and Laura Wright, 'The London Middle English guild certificates of 1388–9', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 39 (1995), 108–45, at p. 122.

⁸² TNA: PRO C 47/39/71.

⁸³ TNA: PRO C 47/39/94(a): fraternity of Corpus Christi at Coningsby, Lincolnshire, 14th century; *Parish Fraternity Register: Fraternity of the Holy Trinity and SS. Fabian and Sebastian in*

earned 6*d.* a day, and 1*d.* would suffice to keep an individual for a day with bread and a dish of meat or fish. Dues might also be rendered in kind, as they were by a clockmaker admitted in 1419 to the Stratford-upon-Avon Holy Cross guild upon his agreeing to make a public clock at the guildhall. The normal rate of admission to the Stratford guild was a single, non-recurrent charge of 13*s.* 4*d.* for a man, 6*s.* 8*d.* for a single woman, and 20*s.* for a married couple: these sums were usually paid by instalments within a year of admission.⁸⁴ In the guild of St George at Norwich, also, single women (whose wages were lower) paid half the fee of a man.⁸⁵ In broad social terms, the preponderance of the membership of the English guilds was drawn from the relatively comfortable peasantry and artisans, and from middling groups of professionals and administrators. The moral standing which was associated, in the public eye, with the ability to make even the most modest contribution to guild funds, distinguished fraternity members from the large, excluded class of the destitute.

In their social definition, the overwhelming tendency across the range of medieval European guilds was to occupy the territory above that of the absolute and probably irredeemably poor, and beneath that of the aristocracy. These limitations would at times be qualified on the one hand by guild charity addressed to the homeless, and on the other by the diplomatic reception of certain grandees as members and patrons of a particular society. On the whole, however, the memberships extended across a wide, middling social range which extended from peasants, artisans, and shopkeepers, to merchants, professional people, and the gentry. The fourteenth century, with its unprecedented demographic and economic pressures, introduced into Europe the first, scattered references to fraternities of beggars and of the poor. By forming religious brotherhoods, such groups sought a measure of social respectability otherwise firmly denied to the poorest classes. The 'poor guild of the poor men of St Augustine's parish' in Norwich, and the 'small and simple fraternity' of 'poor people' of Boston, were both fourteenth-century examples of the expressed anxiety of those on the economic margins of urban society to be allowed a dignified status in contradistinction to the real outsiders, the transient beggars.⁸⁶ Similar *confraternitates pauperum* have been found in urban

the Parish of St. Botolph Without Aldersgate, ed. Patricia Basing, London Record Society, 18 (1982), p. xvii. Recruits to the All Saints guild at Ely contributed 'according to their consciences': PRO C 47/38/20 (founded c.1375). Those joining the guild of Corpus Christi at Beverley made no formal payment, unless they wished to make a free gift: PRO C 47/46/445 (founded early 14th century).

⁸⁴ *The Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross, St Mary and St John the Baptist, Stratford-upon-Avon*, ed. Mairi Macdonald (Stratford-upon-Avon, 2007), 60, 70, 86, 95, etc.

⁸⁵ Ben R. McRee, 'Religious gilds and civic order: the case of Norwich in the late Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 67 (1992), 69–97, at p. 80.

⁸⁶ TNA: PRO C 47/43/292: the guild of St Augustine in Norwich, founded in 1380; PRO C 47/39/86: the guild of St Catherine in Boston, founded in 1349. A similar brotherhood of poor

records elsewhere in northern Europe from the early years of the same century. It has been noted that such groups emerged first as the spontaneous creation of their members. In the later fifteenth century, in a secondary development, they came to be used by civic authorities as means to differentiate between registered mendicants and unlicensed 'foreigners'.⁸⁷ Personal freedom to make the required commitment to the guild and its ideals was seen as vital, and a guild at Heacham in Norfolk explicitly excluded villeins from its ranks. This was in 1359, in the context of demographic upheavals which would contribute to the eventual ending of personal servitude in England: the founders of this guild were evidently eager to underline the perceived moral limitation imposed on one whose body was partly possessed by another.⁸⁸ There was occasionally expressed an equal diffidence with regard to the high and mighty of the world, whose position rendered them, in the view of many guildsmen, suspect. The Corpus Christi guild of St Michael-on-the-Hill in Lincoln declared that

whereas this guild was founded [in 1350] by people of common and middling rank, it is ordained that no-one of the rank of mayor or bailiff shall become a brother of the guild, unless he is found to be of humble, good and honest conversation.⁸⁹

Here again, the exclusion was based on the principle that a member joining the fraternity should be free of external ties of a kind which might compromise the moral goals of the society. The anxiety attendant upon the opening up of membership to the unknown could also be expressed in explicitly political terms, as it was in the mid-fifteenth century by the Florentine company of the Buonomini of San Martino. The rules in this case stated that members should be sought from the ranks of 'citizens, and good families'. The most eminent families were excluded in preference for those of 'middling condition', and the explanation was given that 'mixture can bring discord'.⁹⁰ Such explicit and implied concerns underline the conscious awareness, on the part of those who

people in Sandwich in the 1540s: Sheila Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital in Medieval England: Gift-Giving and the Spiritual Economy* (Dublin, 2004), 213.

⁸⁷ Monika Escher-Apsner, "Confraternitas pauperum" / "Confraternitas exulum": Inklusions- und Exklusionsmodi bruderschaftlicher Organisationen—die sog. Elendenbruderschaften als Sonderform', in Lutz Raphael and Herbert Uerlings, eds, *Zwischen Ausschluss und Solidarität: Modi der Inklusion/Exklusion von Fremden und Armen in Europa seit der Spätantike* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008), 181–212, esp. pp. 201–6 and p. 212 n. 107.

⁸⁸ TNA: PRO C 47/42/234.

⁸⁹ TNA: PRO C 47/40/135; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 178–9.

⁹⁰ Olga Zorzi Pugliese, 'The good works of the Florentine "Buonomini di San Martino": an example of Renaissance pragmatism', in Konrad Eisenbichler, ed., *Crossing the Boundaries: Christian Piety and the Arts in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Confraternities* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1991), 108–20, at pp. 112–13 ('il far mescolanza può partorire discordia').

formed the guilds, of the difficulty and risk entailed in the creation of these artificial relationships.

AT ODDS WITH THE WORLD

A fraternity foundation created a distinct sphere for the practice of moral behaviour. By definition, the establishment of a new group by the swearing of an oath of mutual support and shared intentions was bound to pull the individual participant, in some measure, away from established ways of doing things. The solemnity of the ritual of admission carried supernatural sanctions. In the typical formulation of a fourteenth-century guild of the Holy Trinity in Cambridge:

If a new brother [or sister] wishes to come in, they must have the support of most or all of the brotherhood. In this case, they may be admitted by the alderman and eight brothers, who will first explain publicly the charges and obligations of the guild. If they still wish to join, they shall swear upon the holy gospels to maintain the statutes of the fraternity, to keep its secrets, and to carry out and to accept its corrections.⁹¹

Each new Christian fraternity was a response to Paul's urging: 'Be not conformed to this world.'⁹² We should not over-dramatize this: it has been well argued by Susan Reynolds that the creation of new groups to address novel situations was a normal medieval practice, which was not always regarded or felt as profoundly subversive.⁹³ Nor, however, should we underestimate the critical break with the world which was required of the guild member. Christ's message had been uncompromising:

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather, division. For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father.⁹⁴

Despite their appropriation of familial terms for their members, the guilds similarly marked a radical break with the natural ties of the household. In view of the language of brotherhood and sisterhood universally employed in the

⁹¹ TNA: PRO C47/38/10; printed in *Cambridge Gild Records*, ed. Mary Bateson (Cambridge, 1903), 116–17.

⁹² Rom. 12.2.

⁹³ Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1997), esp. ch. 3. The argument is also generally supported by Pierre Michaud-Quantin, *Universitas: expressions du mouvement communautaire dans le moyen-âge latin* (Paris, 1970).

⁹⁴ Luke 12.51–3; cf. Matt. 10.35.

guilds, it is understandable that Wilda should have seen the institution as an evolution of the family.⁹⁵ But he overlooked the crucial difference: guild membership was voluntary. Definitions of the family have varied over time: they are determined by culture as well as by biology.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the prevailing idea of the family within a particular culture is always naturalized. Guilds, by contrast, were acknowledged to be artificial. Members of a guild agreed to behave towards one another *as if* they were siblings: pretending, in the words of the rules of a guild at Lincoln, that ‘they were children of the same parents’.⁹⁷ In the same spirit Christ, when interrupted in his teaching with the news that his mother and brothers were waiting for him, had answered:

Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.⁹⁸

By the same token, those who joined guilds recognized that commitment to the fraternity potentially undermined family loyalties, just as, for St Francis, conversion had entailed the rejection of his father. The members of a guild of the Trinity at York in 1306 were said to have sworn to assist one another ‘against their fathers, their mothers and their children’.⁹⁹ The point is not that recruitment to guilds broke up families, as a general rule, but rather that the brotherhood and sisterhood of the fraternity was, and was understood to be, of a different order. To embrace one’s neighbours and fellow workers as though they were kin was to acknowledge Christ’s message that, in order to reach God, one was required to put aside the natural ties inherited at birth in favour of a deliberately willed engagement with others. The partial break with an older respect for the ties of blood kinship was recognized by Weber as a distinctive feature of Christianity, which introduced a new ideal model of brotherhood.¹⁰⁰ As soon as such an ideal becomes conventional; when charity has become a matter of obligation; and once love for one’s ‘fellow Christian’

⁹⁵ Wilda, *Das Gildenwesen*.

⁹⁶ Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is—and Is Not* (Chicago, 2013), states—indeed, overstates—the case for the cultural construction of the family. For medieval instances see Jacques Heers, *Family Clans in the Middle Ages: A Study of Political and Social Structures in Urban Areas*, transl. Barry Herbert (Amsterdam, 1977).

⁹⁷ TNA: PRO C 47/40/143: ‘stabunt cum illo [sc. a fellow member] in conciliis et auxiliis sicut frater eorum ex patre eorum et matre.’ The members of the Lincoln guild of St Martin also swore to support one another as if they were all blood brothers. PRO C 47/40/144.

⁹⁸ Matt. 12.49–50.

⁹⁹ Geoffrey O. Sayles, ‘The dissolution of a guild at York in 1306’, *English Historical Review*, 55 (1940), 83–98. Although the evidence was recorded as a charge against this guild, this detail is consistent with the priorities of guilds in general.

¹⁰⁰ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, transl. Ephraim Fischhoff et al., ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, 2 vols (Berkeley, CA, and London, 1978), ii. 1212–20.

has been institutionalized within the formal duties of church membership, the radicalism of that model has been lost, together with its transformative potential. The guilds themselves, in so far as they evolved into objectified and partially bureaucratized agencies of charity, ran this very risk. Repeatedly, however, the founders and joiners of guilds renewed the challenging message of the parable of the Good Samaritan.¹⁰¹ As Christ related the story, the Samaritan did not cross the road to help the wounded Jew because of a prior sense of social duty or moral obligation. He was moved, rather, by a feeling of common humanity, which reached out across the boundaries established by the conventional ties of family, culture, and ethnicity. Such another example was given, once again, by St Francis, who not only rejected his natural father in order to recognize a higher, divine paternity, but who was also radically subversive in his application of the language of brotherhood to his subsequent relationships with lepers and other outcasts of society. As is the case with the terminology used in the guilds themselves, St Francis's address to the natural world as his 'brother' and 'sister' can seem to modern taste saccharine at best, at worst embarrassingly false. But this is the effect of the Romantic filter through which we are at risk of seeing both saint and guilds. If this can be set aside, the language still sounds, as it did in the thirteenth century, both stark and challenging:

Be praised, my lord, for all your creatures, especially our brother Sun . . .
 Be praised, my lord, for sister Moon and Stars . . .
 Be praised, my lord, for brother Wind . . .
 Be praised, my lord, for our sister mortal Death,
 From whom no living man can escape . . .¹⁰²

The *Song of Creation* was radical in its acceptance, without prejudice, of all creatures as equally blessed and therefore equally members of the family of God. By the same token, it undermined individual complacency. The confraternities, which Francis himself encouraged by his example, helped their members to open themselves up to wider engagement with other human beings and with the natural world.

FORGING MORAL SELVES

The guild member was encouraged continually to review his or her sense of what was virtuous. There was a potentially repressive aspect to the moral

¹⁰¹ Luke 10.25–37.

¹⁰² Francis of Assisi, 'Laudes creaturarum' or 'Cantico di Frate Sole', in Gianfranco Contini, ed., *Poeti del Duecento*, 2 vols (Milan and Naples, 1960), i. 33–4.

regulations of the fraternities; but at the same time they provided, for tens of thousands of members, experience in ethical judgement and civic responsibility. The behavioural codes imposed by the guilds were morally conservative, and they can be seen as a force for social control. But for the individual member, the primary point of participation was to use the opportunities provided within the guild to grow in moral experience and judgement. The rules were understood as means to this deeper end. The critical question, therefore, was not the dominant moral framework, but how it was inhabited. This is a manifestation of a more general truth, which was clarified by Michel Foucault:

it is not enough to say that the subject is constituted in a symbolic system. It is not just in the play of symbols that the subject is constituted. It is constituted in real practices—historically analysable practices. There is a technology of the constitution of the self which cuts across symbolic systems while using them.¹⁰³

To enrol in a guild was not to find liberation from the prevailing moral and social norms of late-medieval Christian society. But to participate was to enact those norms in a context in which they were regularly examined, discussed, and internalized. The operations one learned to perform on oneself in order to become and to grow as an ethical subject—with a view, in this context, of becoming a good Christian according to the prevailing expectations of the period—are what Foucault termed ‘techniques of the self’. These called for sustained personal commitment, and offered differential returns according to the level of input. The habits of mutual support, love, and charity which were acquired and practised in the guilds were derived from the dominant discourse. To engage in these works was not, for the individual guild member, to exercise a wholly independent agency. But the men and women who belonged to the fraternities learned to consider themselves in terms of the values which were mediated through the guilds. This was not a Marxian false consciousness, but a dynamic and potentially creative process of engagement with particular ethical models. A guild was a social and moral context in which, with mutual effort and the passage of time, individuality was formed. Saba Mahmood, writing of the women in the modern Cairo mosque movement in relation to the religious discourse within which they live, concludes similarly:

The women are summoned to recognise themselves in terms of the virtues and codes of these traditions, and they come to measure themselves against the ideals furnished by these traditions; in this important sense, the individual is contingently made possible by the discursive logic of the ethical traditions she enacts.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow and transl. Robert Hurley and others (London, 2000), 277.

¹⁰⁴ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, 2005), 32.

It is Mahmood's contention that, even in a cultural situation in which no autonomy is granted to the individual, there is none the less agency in the particular ways in which ethical norms are discussed and understood within the group, and in which they are enacted in everyday life. The same may be said of the guilds, especially in relation to the ways in which they sought to highlight the continuing relevance of traditional Christian teaching within a changing world. In their address to the late-medieval realities of demographic upheaval in both town and country, the increased dislocation of individuals, and the disruption of family ties, the guilds—like the mendicant orders, from which, as already noted, they drew inspiration—found a substantial unresolved terrain in which they were left largely free to pursue their self-identified roles of mission and Christian example. In this perspective, it is possible to see how guild membership could lead the individual from exterior interaction with others to the modification of his or her interior identity. Such a model of the relationship between the group and the single person resonates with Roberto Esposito's description of an oscillating interaction which enables the interior self to open up to a controlled injection of social and communal values: an alien element which can immunize and strengthen the host without negating its individuality.¹⁰⁵

ETHICS OF CARE

As the following parts of this book will show, the ethics cultivated in the medieval guilds differed from both the Kantian and the utilitarian ethics which have dominated this field in recent Western philosophy. These two modern traditions share the basic presumption that a moral act is one performed by an autonomous, rational, and dispassionate agent. In each case, a fundamental premise is the independent liberty of the individual, whose moral capacity and actions are understood in exclusively personal terms. The conditions of membership of a medieval guild, by contrast, assumed ethics to be relational. Ignorant of the liberal individualism of more recent centuries, the members of the guilds were encouraged to grow in moral maturity through the care with which they interacted with one another and with outsiders. The care, or charity, of the guilds was not the dispassionately dispensed benevolence of a self-sufficient agent. It was, rather, a mutual relationship, cultivated over time, whereby fraternity members allowed themselves to be changed even as they changed others. In this the ethics of the guilds closely resemble the ethics of care which have emerged, as a distinct branch of moral philosophy, at the turn

¹⁰⁵ See pp. 29–30.

of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Originating in a feminist critique of aspects of rationalism and liberal individualism, the ethics of care acknowledge and engage with the emotions and relational capabilities which are deliberately excluded from rationalistic moral theories. The emphasis is not on the rights and agency of the individual but on the qualities of care and sensitivity in a relationship. As Virginia Held has written:

Those who conscientiously care for others are not seeking primarily to further their own *individual* interests; their interests are intertwined with the persons they care for. Neither are they acting for the sake of *all others* or *humanity in general*; they seek instead to preserve or promote an actual human relation between themselves and *particular others*. Persons in caring relations are acting for self-and-other together. Their characteristic stance is neither egoistic nor altruistic; these are the options in a conflictual situation, but the well-being of a caring relation involves the cooperative well-being of those in the relation and the well-being of the relation itself.¹⁰⁶

This describes well a core ideal of the medieval guilds.

The ethics of care also bring us close to the guilds in a further respect. Both cases problematize, and indeed reject, the modern distinction between private and public fields of action. Whereas it remains common in modern discourse to differentiate between the morality of intimate relationships and that of the public arena of disinterested citizenship, both the ethics of care and the medieval guilds dispute that separation of moral spheres. In the words of another leading exponent of the ethics of care:

The insulation of citizen values from considerations relating to the particularity of persons and their relational concerns denies the imperative connection between shared public values and the caring practices and values developed in intimate life.¹⁰⁷

In the perspective of the medieval guilds and of the ethics of care alike, to deny the interconnectedness of different aspects of life and to impose such a distinction is, on the one hand, to leave relations of intimacy at risk of abuse and, on the other, to restrict the ethical opportunities of citizenship.

DOCUMENTING ETHICS

It is clear that such a process of ethical formation as was fostered within the guilds is not to be understood as driven by independently willing agents. Every

¹⁰⁶ Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford, 2005), 12.

¹⁰⁷ Peta Bowden, *Caring: Gender-Sensitive Ethics* (London, 1997), 167.

decision of a guild member was informed by supervening discourses of Christian theology and political power. The concern here, however, is with the ways in which association in guilds enabled groups of men and women to inhabit those discourses in particular ways, generating in turn distinctive kinds of interpersonal relationships. The absence from the record of subjective testimonies is not problematic for this study. It is not to be expected, in Europe prior to 1600, that we should find individuals (excepting a tiny minority of mystics) who conceived of themselves as autonomous and introverted to the point of recording their soul-searching reflections, and indeed the genres of the Catholic or Puritan spiritual diary which became familiar between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries are unknown at this earlier period. It is natural, therefore, and not to be regretted, that we lack intimate personal records of individual guild members from the medieval period. We remain, instead, heavily dependent for evidence of the medieval European guilds upon their normative statutes and administrative records, supplemented by the usually laconic references made by members in their testaments. In the drafting of statutes, guild priests may be assumed to have played an influential part; but as will be discussed below, these priests were themselves subject to the control and supervision of the lay membership. In a number of cases, the statutes of a guild are complemented by surviving accounts, which amplify the picture of its activities and provide some measure of control on the ideal ambitions laid out in the ordinances. All of these sources must be handled with due regard for their limitations.

Extensive use is made in what follows of the returns made by the English fraternities to the royal inquest instituted in 1388–9, and on this body of evidence a particular comment is required. In a period of mounting social tensions created by demographic crisis, and in the aftermath of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, the legitimacy of sworn associations of peasants and artisans came under increasing scrutiny. The issue rose to dramatic prominence when, in the summer of 1388, the parliament held at Cambridge petitioned, on grounds of public security, for the complete suppression of all fraternities.¹⁰⁸ The records of this parliament are lost, but the contemporary monastic chronicler of Westminster provides an informed and circumstantial report that the MPs demanded:

that all guilds and fraternities and their common chests shall be abolished and done away with for all time and the goods and chattels in their possession laid out upon the war . . .¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ J. Anthony Tuck, 'The Cambridge parliament, 1388', *English Historical Review*, 84 (1969), 225–43.

¹⁰⁹ *The Westminster Chronicle*, ed. Leonard Charles Hector and Barbara F. Harvey (Oxford, 1982), 356–7.

Although the king's precise response is unknown, the royal government moved directly to institute a national inquiry into all fraternities throughout the country, which were required to submit answers to a series of searching questions about their aims, resources, and activities.¹¹⁰ The collection of material for the inquiry was pursued with assiduity by the royal sheriffs, who were instructed to proclaim throughout the counties of England that the masters of these bodies were responsible for supplying the required information. In Oxfordshire, for example, this proclamation was made in a dozen places between 8 November and the beginning of December.¹¹¹ Some five hundred returns are extant, representative of most parts of the country although with a greatly uneven density which suggests that bundles of this material have been lost. For example, only four returns survive from the entire county of Oxfordshire (three of these from Oxford itself), where the multiple proclamations were clearly predicated on the perception of a much more numerous presence.¹¹² There is a significant degree of repetition amongst local groups of ordinances, which indicates that some companies, in particular amongst the smaller societies, had recourse to pooling resources and sharing a scribe or lawyer. It may well be that some of the depositions were made orally at Westminster, the record being copied down in partially standardized form by royal officials.¹¹³ Beyond these considerations, the context of the royal inquiry, prompted by a petition from parliament arising from allegations of secrecy and subversion in the guilds, means that there was an obvious incentive, when answering the questions of the royal surveyors, to emphasize pious ideals and to remain silent about activities which could attract suspicion.¹¹⁴ These records, therefore, must be used with caution: they certainly do not tell us all that we should like to know about the guilds. But there is no reason to disregard the evidence, which runs through the entire series and is expressed in a great variety of detail, of the fraternities' common concern with the establishment and practice of ethical values.

¹¹⁰ *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1385–89*, p. 624; *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith.

¹¹¹ John Maddicott, 'The county community and the making of public opinion in fourteenth-century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 28 (1978), 27–43, at p. 35.

¹¹² TNA: PRO C 47/45/388–91.

¹¹³ Jan Gerchow, 'Memoria als Norm: Aspekte englischer Gildenstatuten des 14. Jahrhunderts', in Geuenich and Oexle, eds, *Memoria in der Gesellschaft*, 207–66; Gerchow, 'Gilds and fourteenth-century bureaucracy: the case of 1388–9', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 40 (1996), 109–48.

¹¹⁴ Ben McRee, 'Charity and gild solidarity in late medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, 32 (1993), 195–225, at p. 198, puts a little more strongly the view that the charitable stipulations in the guild certificates were tactical.

A NEW LIFE

For an individual to enrol in a medieval guild was to mark the beginning of a change of life. The threshold was solemnly observed. The fraternity member's assumption of an altered identity on entering the society was marked by livery hoods, gowns and badges, gestures and staged ceremonies which marked the individual's admission to the group. The most visible shared marker of adherence to a particular fraternity was a common livery. Sometimes the costume was issued by the society, as in the case of the Holy Trinity fraternity of Ingham in Norfolk, each of whose brothers and sisters received, in their first year of membership, a white mantle bearing the cross of the guild.¹¹⁵ More commonly members were expected to purchase their own liveries (ordered on their behalf by the fraternity), and would typically be required to keep them for two years before they were renewed.¹¹⁶ The colour and the cut of the costume were regularly changed to ensure that they retained both their currency and their distinctiveness.¹¹⁷ So integral was the livery to the identity of a member that in the 'little fraternity of Our Lady's light' in the church of St Stephen, Coleman Street in London, a brother or sister who was prevented by poverty from purchasing their own clothing

shall have at least a hood of the suit in token that he is a brother of the fraternity so that he be holden brother or sister of good condition and honest.¹¹⁸

Badges might also be worn on ceremonial occasions. In the early sixteenth century the Westminster guild of the Assumption of Our Lady paid a goldsmith for a stamp with which to make the members' 'brooches'.¹¹⁹

The creation of a new family in the guild was further embodied in a physical embrace between members. Characteristic was the kiss of charity exchanged between an initiate and the entire fellowship of the brothers and sisters of the fraternity of St Fabian and St Sebastian in the church of St Botolph

¹¹⁵ TNA: PRO C 47/42/236.

¹¹⁶ This was a common provision: for example, in the guild of St Giles and St Julian, King's Lynn, by an ordinance of 1431: 'that every brother shall take the livery that is ordained for the company as much as he will wear and keep it for two years', on pain of a fine of 20*d*. Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, MS King's Lynn Gd.37, *sub anno*.

¹¹⁷ For examples from the replies to the national inquiry into guilds of 1388, see TNA: PRO C 47/38/39, members of the guild of St John the Baptist, Wisbech, to buy a cap of the guild livery and to retain it for two years; C 47/41/188, the robe of the London guild of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary to be kept by members for two years.

¹¹⁸ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS London Rolls, 4; printed in Barron and Wright, 'The London Middle English guild certificates', 129 (1389).

¹¹⁹ Westminster Abbey Muniment Room, Accounts of the guild of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, triennial accounts for 1516–19.

Aldersgate, London.¹²⁰ In a Limoges example, the new brother was required 'to touch each of the brothers as a sign of peace'.¹²¹ Musical harmony in the form of hymn singing by the community accompanied the admission of new members into a guild at Bury St Edmunds.¹²² A society of St John the Baptist at Baston in Lincolnshire demonstrated its integrative and harmonious aspirations through the midsummer dances of its female members.¹²³ The new life of membership in the guild was marked off from the surrounding world by its distinctive patterns of costume, gesture, and comportment.

A CODE FOR LIVING

In their specific moral ordinances, guilds proposed a discourse of good behaviour which was then appropriated by members as the basis of a mode of life which would be regularly measured against these particular ideals. At the core of their social ethic was a perennial concern with peace in the community. Some of the earliest surviving guild statutes, dating from around the year 1000, responded to a perceived tendency to violence within the group. These rules, which relate to an aristocratic guild of thegns and their retainers at Cambridge, are largely concerned with the regulation of the practice of blood-feud:

If . . . the guild-brother kill anyone foolishly and wantonly, he is himself to be responsible for what he has done. And if a guild-brother slay a guild-brother through his own folly, he is himself to be responsible towards the kindred for the offence he has committed, and to buy back his membership of the guild with eight pounds, or he is to forfeit for ever fellowship and friendship . . .

If, on the one hand, the violent tenor of life evoked by these regulations is suggestive of a society as yet only partially touched by Christian principles, on the other hand the guild itself represented the potential to infuse a traditional culture of revenge with a new leaven of peaceful restraint.¹²⁴ There is a significant echo, in the rhetoric and activities of this early English guild, of the 'Peace of God' movement in other parts of contemporary Europe, in which laymen formed self-help associations with the similar aim of addressing an evident problem of bloodshed with the imperative of Christian peace.¹²⁵ The

¹²⁰ TNA: PRO C 47/41/198; printed in *English Guilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 9. Cf. *Parish Fraternity Register*, ed. Basing.

¹²¹ Vincent, 'L'appart des confréries', 112.

¹²² TNA: PRO C 47/46/404.

¹²³ TNA: PRO C47/39/76.

¹²⁴ *English Historical Documents*, i. 657–9. See further Chapter 4.

¹²⁵ H. E. J. Cowdrey, 'The Peace and the Truce of God in the eleventh century', *Past and Present*, 46 (1970), 42–67; Richard Landes, 'Between aristocracy and heresy: popular participation in the Limousin Peace of God, 994–1033', in Thomas Head and Richard Landes, eds, *The*

political context in England at this time was distinguished by the degree to which the crown now claimed responsibility for the maintenance of the public peace; but King Athelstan was not above collaborating with another such association in early tenth-century London: a 'peace guild' (*fryðgegyldum*) which involved royal sheriffs, bishops, and a variety of others in the process of maintaining order in and around the city.¹²⁶ Public authority at this date had something to learn from the neighbourhood fraternities, and the lesson would also be imbibed by the governments of the Italian civic communes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Characteristic was the role played in public peace-keeping in thirteenth-century Bologna by a confraternity known as the *devoti*. The group, whose statutes declared a commitment to both spiritual and civic peace, is known to have involved itself in the reconciliation of factions, and was given communal protection.¹²⁷

Beyond the issue of overt violence, the guild statutes addressed other ways in which members should cultivate a moral decorum both within and beyond the group. We may imagine, also, that these injunctions were reinforced in the homilies often recorded as being of particular concern to the guilds.¹²⁸ Drunkenness, the casting of insults, and scandalous modes of dress were all repudiated by guilds at Lynn.¹²⁹ A Wisbech guild in 1384 specified that quarrelling or gambling would be reprovved and that persistence would lead to expulsion.¹³⁰ One at Lancaster, in statutes dated 1377, elaborated at length its hostility to adultery, which was also condemned at the same period by a guild in Lichfield: in the latter case an offender was to be struck from the guild register, 'even as that of the malefactor from the Book of Life'.¹³¹ A guild at Outwell in Norfolk specified theft as a reason for expulsion, while that of St Augustine in London would eject a member found to be keeping a brothel.¹³² In another London example recorded in 1389:

Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000 (Ithaca and London, 1992), 184–218.

¹²⁶ *English Historical Documents*, i. 424–7. The sworn members of this guild, in addition to their policing role, paid for commemorative masses and alms on the death of a brother.

¹²⁷ Jennifer Fisk Rondeau, 'Homosociality and civic (dis)order in late medieval Italian confraternities', in Nicholas Terpstra, ed., *The Politics of Ritual Kinship: Confraternities and the Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, 2000), 30–47, at pp. 36–7, with references.

¹²⁸ e.g. the Westminster guild of St Mary Rounceval. Rosser, *Medieval Westminster*, 277. Some of the moral concerns and ordinances of the guilds were enumerated by Barbara Hanawalt, 'Keepers of the lights: late medieval English parish guilds', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 14 (1984), 21–37; Barbara A. Hanawalt and Ben R. McCree, 'The guilds of *homo prudens* in late medieval England', *Continuity and Change*, 7 (1992), 163–79.

¹²⁹ *English Guilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 81, 87, 107.

¹³⁰ TNA: PRO C 47/38/41.

¹³¹ TNA: PRO C 47/39/69; Gervase Rosser, 'The guild of St Mary and St John the Baptist, Lichfield: ordinances of the late fourteenth century', *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, 4th series, 13 (1988), 19–26, ordinance 6.

¹³² TNA: PRO C 47/44/310; C 47/41/193.

If any man be of good estate and use him to lie long in bed, and at rising of his bed he will not work to win his sustenance and keep his house, and go to the tavern, to the wine, to the ale, to wrestling, to shooting, and in this manner fall poor and lose his chattels in his default, [then] for succour and trust for to be helped of the fraternity, that man shall never have good nor help of the company, neither in his life nor at his death, but he shall be put off for evermore of this company.¹³³

A worldly concern with the public image of the fraternity goes some way to account for the prevalence of these moral injunctions, but it is not a sufficient explanation for their prominence and centrality in guild ordinances. Both in their rules and in their practice of everyday life, the guilds were attempting to take up and to embody the Christian ideals of the gospel, insisting as they did so on their continuing immediacy and relevance within the context of a changing, local, and particular society. Their rules for comportment and moral behaviour sprang from the conviction that it was from interaction with others that an individual derived examples for living and forged their ethical identity.

CORRECTION AND ARBITRATION

The ethical behaviour of members was subject to regular review at guild meetings. Each member of the York guild of St John the Baptist in the fourteenth century bound himself or herself not to quarrel with the others, or to submit to the correction of the master and twelve of the brethren.¹³⁴ If members of a Cambridge guild quarrelled, the officers undertook to 'take care to bring them back into peace and concord by whatever ways and means they appropriately can'.¹³⁵ The thrice-yearly assemblies of a Wisbech guild, apart from its guild feast, were said to be 'for the correction and amending of members' behaviour'.¹³⁶ Guilds at Westminster and Lynn around 1500 recorded fines imposed on members who spoke rudely to others, or who took legal action against their brothers and sisters in public courts rather than submitting disputes to internal resolution. At Westminster, for example, Robert Grant was fined

for misbehaving himself in words speaking at a quarter day kept in the 'chequer chamber on St Thomas's day in Christmas, in the presence of all the masters and brethren, then being present Master Walter Gardener, John Wryght and John

¹³³ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS London Rolls, 2; printed in Barron and Wright, 'The London Middle English guild certificates', 123 (spelling and punctuation modernized).

¹³⁴ TNA: PRO C 47/46/455.

¹³⁵ *Cambridge Gild Records*, ed. Mary Bateson (Cambridge, 1903), 103–4.

¹³⁶ TNA: PRO C 47/38/39.

Ford, wardens, the which words were spoken to William Myllys and Edward Stokwod, then churchwardens of St Margaret's, and there he was judged by all the house to pay a pound of wax and so he paid there 10*d*.

The same guild appointed counsel for each party in the dispute.¹³⁷ A fifteenth-century guild at King's Lynn invoked classical authority for their practice:

As Tully says in his book *De Senectute*: 'Do nothing without counsel, which comes from age and authority.' So we shall have at least three council meetings a year.¹³⁸

In the words of one of these societies, typical in this respect of all, 'there should be no need for any besides fraternity members to intervene between the quarrelling parties'.¹³⁹ These regulations were partly motivated by a desire to sanitize the public image of the society; but their specificity and their insistence upon the value of peace within the fellowship go beyond a concern with reputation. Behind all of these provisions for the mutual settlement of disputes lay St Paul's admonition to the Corinthians: 'I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother.'¹⁴⁰

The evidence does not suffice to enable us to quantify the contribution of the guilds to the settlement of disputes in late-medieval England. But it is clear that these procedures amounted to a significant element in the range of legal and para-legal resources available to their members. It has been shown that litigants in this period were aware of, and able to deploy, a variety of official and unofficial processes for the resolution of personal cases.¹⁴¹ Despite the documented popularity of the royal courts, the opportunistic appeal

¹³⁷ Westminster Abbey Muniment Room, Accounts of the guild of Our Lady's Assumption, unnumbered MSS, accounts for 1518–21; this extract printed in Herbert F. Westlake, *St Margaret's Westminster* (London, 1914), 57–8, and see p. 73. Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, MS King's Lynn Gd.78, Statutes and accounts of the guild of St Antony, 1467–1537, *sub anno* 1516: William Spaldyng and Thomas Johnson, butchers, fined because they 'violently usurped in words and deeds in the presence of the alderman sitting on the general day'.

¹³⁸ Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, MS King's Lynn Gd.81, Ordinances of the guild of St John the Baptist, 1369. This guild was instituted by 'clerks' but included both male and female members.

¹³⁹ TNA: PRO C 47/38/39 (guild of St John the Baptist, Wisbech). Further English examples: TNA: PRO C 47/44/339 (guild of All Saints, Upwell, Norfolk); TNA: PRO C 47/46/45, printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 158–9 (guild of the Virgin Mary, Hull). Scottish instances: Mairie Cowan, *Death, Life, and Religious Change in Scottish Towns, c.1350–1560* (Manchester, 2012), 105–6. Resolution of quarrels within the guild could not always be guaranteed: Susan Brigden, 'Religion and social obligation in early sixteenth-century London', *Past and Present*, 103 (1984), 67–112, at p. 97.

¹⁴⁰ 1 Cor. 6.5–6.

¹⁴¹ Edward Powell, 'Settlement of disputes by arbitration in fifteenth-century England', *Law and History Review*, 2 (1984), 21–43; Powell, *Kingship, Law and Society: Criminal Justice in the Reign of Henry V* (Oxford, 1989); Carole Rawcliffe, 'Parliament and the settlement of disputes by arbitration in the later Middle Ages', *Parliamentary History*, 9 (1990), 316–42; Joel T. Rosenthal,

successively to diverse judicial and extra-judicial practices indicates that the users of these resources had little interest in narrowing their range or ensuring the monopoly of regnal justice. The growth of public systems of law at this period does not appear to have reduced the recourse to the self-regulated, morally framed forums for reconciliation made available by the guilds.

It deserves particular emphasis that these processes of moral correction in the English guilds were carried out by the lay members. While fraternity chaplains will certainly have played a role in this context, we do not hear in surviving evidence of the employment, as was sometimes recorded in Italy, of clerical spiritual advisors whose duties specifically included the imposition of penance for faults. The member of the fifteenth-century Florentine *Compagnia di Gesù Pellegrino* who had infringed the rules of the society was obliged to kneel before the friar confessor to acknowledge his error, and then submit to a scale of penitential flagellation. Even in these cases, however, the corrector himself was subject to the rules of the fraternity, whose direction remained in the hands of the lay officials.¹⁴² The guilds shared a concern for their institutional reputation which reinforced the desire to resolve contentions both without expenditure on lawyers and without attracting public notice. But the underlying principle was that the voluntary member of such an association should expect, sooner or later, to take a personal part in the judgement of issues concerning social and moral behaviour—whether their own or that of others.

PRIESTS IN SERVICE

Equally characteristic of the active ethical engagement of these groups of lay men and women in late-medieval England was the deliberate assurance with which they hired—and fired—their priests. A representative instance is the guild of St Mary and St John the Baptist in the cathedral town of Lichfield, founded in 1387. A leading concern of the society was to provide guild chaplains who might assist the parochial clergy in the provision of daily offices in the town chapel. St Mary's chapel in the market-place, founded in the twelfth century as the chapel of the bishop's then new town of Lichfield, was not raised to parochial status until the sixteenth century. In the late Middle Ages it remained a parcel of another parish and was under the control of the dean and chapter of the cathedral, the cure of souls in St Mary's being in

'Feuds and private peace-making: a fifteenth-century example', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 14 (1970), 84–90.

¹⁴² John Henderson, 'Confraternities and the Church in late medieval Florence', in W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, eds, *Voluntary Religion* (Oxford, 1986), 69–83, at pp. 74–5.

principle the responsibility of the canons.¹⁴³ In all ecclesiastical matters the townspeople were subject to the peculiar jurisdiction of the dean.¹⁴⁴ Yet in 1389 the inhabitants, vindicating their right to have their guild, voiced the claim that they could count upon only one active parish chaplain, whose services were so far inadequate to the *magna multitudo* of the parishioners that secular attendance at mass was of necessity irregular.¹⁴⁵ Whatever the efforts of the chaplains put in by the chapter, they were considered insufficient by the members of the guild, who employed in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries no fewer than four or even five full-time chaplains celebrating daily in the chapel, 'in order that divine services there should be offered with greater glory in God's praise'.¹⁴⁶ The guild chaplains, unlike the canons' designates, were subject to close supervision by the laity. The appointment of a chaplain was made 'at the sole discretion of the master and wardens, with the assistance of as many of the sounder brethren of the guild as seems expedient'; the candidate was additionally subjected to examination by the other chaplains. In order that the guild priests should be closely monitored, all were required to live in common in a hall provided by the guild beside the chapel; there they ate and slept together. A priest found morally or otherwise wanting was subject to dismissal.¹⁴⁷ Similar provisions applied to the four priests employed in the fifteenth century by the Holy Cross guild of Stratford-upon-Avon. They provided daily masses in the guild chapel at six, seven, eight, and nine in the morning, with the possibility of an earlier service if one of the guild had to leave town on business. As at Lichfield, these clerks likewise lived, under strict supervision, in a shared house within the complex of guild buildings: their daily movements were controlled, and the sound of 'any noise or slander' would lead to expulsion.¹⁴⁸ Thus the flock watched the shepherd.

¹⁴³ H. Jenkins, 'Lichfield Cathedral in the fourteenth century', B.Litt. thesis, University of Oxford (1956), i. 95; Peter Heath, 'Staffordshire towns and the Reformation', *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies*, 19 (1979), 1–21, at p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Anne J. Kettle, 'City and close: Lichfield in the century before the Reformation', in Caroline M. Barron and Christopher Harper-Bill, eds, *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society* (Woodbridge, 1985), 158–69, at pp. 160–1.

¹⁴⁵ TNA: PRO C 47/45/395.

¹⁴⁶ Lichfield Joint Record Office, MS D.30/XVIII, fols 15^v, 17, 19; *The Itinerary of John Leland*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith (London, 1908), ii. 99–100. At the time of its dissolution in 1546–8, the guild maintained four priests and, in addition, a deacon, two parish clerks, and two singing-children. *Staffordshire Historical Collections* (1915), 171.

¹⁴⁷ Rosser, 'The guild of St Mary and St John the Baptist, Lichfield', 19–26, ordinances 12–18; Lichfield Joint Record Office, MS D.30/VC, Palimpsest, i, fol. 28. Further on this guild see Gervase Rosser, 'The town and guild of Lichfield in the late Middle Ages', *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 27 (1987 for 1985–6), 39–47.

¹⁴⁸ Ordinances of the guild of Holy Cross, Stratford-upon-Avon, transcribed in 1443 into the guild ledger. Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, MS BRT 1/1, fol. 1; printed in *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross . . . Stratford-upon-Avon*, 34–8.

HABITS OF DEVOTION

The lay memberships of the fraternities not only exercised the power to elect priests of their choice to serve the guild chantries; they played an influential part in determining the character of liturgical practice and introducing new habits of prayer. All of these devotions manifested both a liturgical and a more intimate and personal dimension. Once again they demonstrate the potential for the communal life of the guild to contribute to the formation of the interior self. Previous historical discussion of the guilds has tended to be informed by a supposed contradiction between the collective manifestation of fraternal piety and the interior spirituality of the individual. The guilds have even been accused of failing to cultivate the 'religious perfection' of their members.¹⁴⁹ The preoccupation, prominent in all fraternities, with the decent burial and commemoration of dead members was no doubt in part an expression of that 'natural religion of kinship and friendship' which John Bossy identified in medieval attitudes to death—and in the fraternities.¹⁵⁰ Yet to describe the liturgy of intercession as a 'bare skeleton', effectively snubbed by a virtually pagan celebration of social community, is to ignore the theological meaning of the dense elaboration of masses for the dead introduced by the guilds. All guilds made provision for the decent burial of a deceased member, usually attended by the entire company, and for posthumous intercession on his or her behalf.¹⁵¹ By a typical arrangement, a priest of the guild of St Botolph Aldersgate in London read aloud the names of present and deceased members on the day of the annual obit.¹⁵² The priest of St Peter's guild in the church of that dedication on Cornhill in London was kept busy daily throughout the year upon the task of offering a plethora of memorial masses and prayers for the brothers and sisters of the fraternity, living and dead; his duties were hardly more onerous than those of many another guild chaplain.¹⁵³

Many fraternities were also active in the development and promotion of both traditional and new objects and forms of prayer, as means to the ethical formation of individual members. These various liturgical events were a public affirmation of shared commitment to new emphases in devotion, whether focused upon the cult of saints, upon the Virgin Mary as spiritual intercessor, or upon the Incarnation and Passion of Christ. Modern accounts of late

¹⁴⁹ e.g. Étienne Delaruelle et al., *Histoire de l'Église depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, 14, *L'Église au temps du Grand Schisme et de la crise conciliaire (1378–1449)*, 2 vols (Paris, 1962–4), 688, 701; Paul Adam, *La vie paroissiale en France au XIV^e siècle* (Paris, 1964), p. 50. Cf. pp. 15–17 in the present study.

¹⁵⁰ John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), 27, 57–63.

¹⁵¹ Further on death and commemoration in the guilds, see Chapter 6.

¹⁵² *Parish Fraternity Register*, 4.

¹⁵³ London, Guildhall Library, MS 4158, fols 135^v–137, 147^v–152^v; printed in *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Sixth Report: Appendix* (1877), 411–14.

medieval piety have stressed the emotive aspect of some of these themes and have cited them as instances of the bodily and intimate devotional engagement of the individual Christian.¹⁵⁴ But before they could be internalized, the habits of the new devotion were acquired and practised in the collective contexts of the parishes and especially the guilds. A guild of St Mary at Louth in Lincolnshire, founded in 1329, closely resembled the *laudesi* companies of Tuscany which met regularly to address hymns to images of the Virgin. As in the Italian confraternities of the same period, the Louth guild employed a chaplain to lead a service every evening at sunset before an image of the Madonna, with singing of the *Salve Regina*.¹⁵⁵ The primary declared aim of the York Paternoster guild, founded before 1389, was the explication to others of the Lord's Prayer. The guild designed a board on which were displayed, presumably through the medium of texts, 'the whole meaning and use' of the prayer; this board was hung up in the minster for all who could read to peruse. The illiterate, meanwhile, were entertained and edified by the regular performance by the guild of 'a play setting forth the goodness of the Lord's Prayer'. The drama showed the triumph of virtues over vices: each phrase of the prayer was held to countervail against a particular deadly sin.¹⁵⁶ The guild of St Nicholas at Bury St Edmunds and that of St John the Baptist at Bristol each required members to say daily three Pater Nosters and three Ave Marias for the living and for the dead.¹⁵⁷ At Maldon in Essex, members of the fraternity of the Virgin Mary undertook to recite the Psalter of Our Lady three times a year, while at Bury the guild of St Botolph imposed the much heavier responsibility that each brother and sister was to say the Psalter once a week.¹⁵⁸ Members of the Corpus Christi guild of Norwich undertook to say each day an antiphon for the feast of Corpus Christi, with an associated verse of scripture and collect: a requirement which implies the distribution of copies of these texts, together with a serious commitment to a common practice of prayer in the fraternity.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ See p. 16 and references.

¹⁵⁵ TNA: PRO C 47/41/162; see also Chapter 4. For the Italian *laudesi* companies see Meerssemann, *Ordo fraternitatis*; John Henderson, *Piety and Charity in Late Medieval Florence* (Oxford, 1994).

¹⁵⁶ *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 137–40; E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1903), ii. 154–5; Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages* (Oxford 1955), 37–41; Alexandra F. Johnston, 'The plays of the religious guilds of York—the Creed Play and the Pater Noster Play', *Speculum*, 50 (1975), 55–90; David J. F. Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power: Religious Gilds in Late Medieval Yorkshire, 1389–1547* (York, 2000), 130. A record of the guild from 1399 is discussed in P. M. Hoskin, 'The accounts of the medieval Paternoster Guild of York', *Northern History*, 44 (2007), 7–33. The Pater Noster play was last performed at York in 1572.

¹⁵⁷ TNA: PRO C 47/46/415; Francis F. Fox, *Some Account of the Ancient Fraternity of Merchant Taylors of Bristol* (Bristol, 1890), 5–7.

¹⁵⁸ TNA: PRO C 47/39/55; C 47/46/404.

¹⁵⁹ TNA: PRO C 47/43/291.

Other guilds took up and promoted newly sanctioned doctrines and patterns of devotion. The cult of Corpus Christi, adopted as a feast of the Church in England around 1318, owed its wide dissemination in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries very largely to the efforts of lay fraternities.¹⁶⁰ These bodies organized processions surrounding the liturgy of the festal day and fostered understanding of the doctrine; the early fifteenth-century text of the ordinances of the York guild of Corpus Christi is preceded by a sermon on 'Hoc est corpus meum'.¹⁶¹ The growth in the fourteenth century of devotion to the Wounds of Christ is reflected in the contemporary practice of a guild at Great Yarmouth of meeting on a Friday after vespers to say together repeatedly five Pater Nosters and five Ave Marias, 'in honour of the wounds of Our Lord'.¹⁶² In the second half of the following century, the growing popularity of the Name of Jesus prayer found expression in a proliferation of guilds of this dedication. Jesus guilds normally organized a weekly mass on Friday; that at Salisbury additionally arranged choral services on the Fridays in Lent.¹⁶³ The London guild of this dedication, founded in the mid-fifteenth century and based in the crypt of St Paul's cathedral, in the 1530s hired a band of musicians to go with banners embroidered with the 'Jesus' emblem (the symbol made of the letters 'IHS') through

all the streets and suburbs of London, playing with their instruments to give warning and knowledge to the people of the said fraternity for the feasts of Transfiguration [6 August] and Name of Jesus [7 August].¹⁶⁴

A Bury St Edmunds guild with a dedication to the 'Sweet Man Jesus' was founded in 1481 with the sole declared purpose of encouraging prayer.¹⁶⁵ As

¹⁶⁰ Miri Rubin, 'Corpus Christi fraternities and late medieval piety', in W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, eds, *Voluntary Religion* (Oxford, 1986), 97–109; Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), 243–87.

¹⁶¹ *The Register of the Guild of Corpus Christi in the City of York*, ed. R. H. Skaife, Surtees Society, 57 (1871), 1–6.

¹⁶² TNA: PRO C 47/45/368. For the cult, see *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edn, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford, 1997), 1767 (with references).

¹⁶³ For the feast, see Richard W. Pfaff, *New Liturgical Feasts in Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 1970), 62–83. For Jesus guilds see e.g. Caroline M. Barron, 'The parish fraternities of medieval London', in C. M. Barron and C. Harper-Bill, eds, *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society* (Woodbridge, 1985), 13–37, at p. 32; Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370–1532* (Toronto, 1984), 94, 103, 216, 219; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476–85*, p. 259; *The Churchwardens' Accounts of S. Edmund and S. Thomas, Sarum, 1443–1702*, ed. H. J. F. Swayne (Salisbury, 1896), 248–72 *passim*; Andrew Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury 1250–1550* (Oxford, 1995), 138–42.

¹⁶⁴ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 221, fol. 19. The feast of the Transfiguration of Christ was introduced as a universal feast of the western Church in 1457; that of the Name of Jesus was first granted by the papacy to the Franciscan order in 1530. The guild is referred to in Elizabeth New, 'Fraternities in English cathedrals in the medieval period', in Tim Thornton, ed., *Social Attitudes and Political Structures in the Fifteenth Century* (Stroud, 2000), 33–51, at pp. 42–3.

¹⁶⁵ *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1476–85*, p. 259.

in all these cases, however, it is important to recognize the complementary relationship between the exterior practice of the cult in the context of guild assemblies (and its periodic address to a wider civic audience in processions) and its progressive interiorization as it became an integral and formative part of the life of the individual member of the group. The devotion to the name of Jesus was typical of these late-medieval devotions in being a practice commonly learned in the collective environment of a guild and there internalized, becoming in turn an integral part of the individual. Domestic devotion was similarly encouraged by Tuscan guilds at the same period. That of Impruneta to the south of Florence required members to say a Pater Noster and an Ave Maria at sleeping and rising and at each meal, with a further encouragement to meditate on the Five Wounds of Christ, the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Trinity.¹⁶⁶ Equally characteristic of the period was the developing cult of angels, with a particular focus on the invocation of one's personal guardian angel. The devotion was encouraged through guilds, such as a fraternity of the guardian angels founded in the mid-fifteenth century in a chapel of the Virgin Mary and the Nine Orders of Angels near Brentford in Middlesex. A member and patroness of this guild, a pious widow, was almost certainly the owner of a devotional book designed for private use, containing intimate texts including the following:

O thow angell of God that keptyst owr lord Ihesu Crist yn hys manhode, and thu blessyd angell that keptist hys blessyd modur Mary, helpeth my good angell to kepe me that love pes and charite. Be between God and all the worlde and me.¹⁶⁷

The culture of the guilds fostered a continual oscillation between the spiritual development of the individual member and the social aims and practice of the group. This was not the sole available model for Christian growth, and it was contested, in particular, by the small number of ascetics who devoted themselves entirely to a life of solitary prayer. One of these, who achieved a wide reputation in his lifetime as a holy man and a posthumous cult as a popular saint, the Yorkshireman Richard Rolle (d. c.1349), held that there could be no comparison with a life which was truly removed from the world:

There have been people, and there probably still are, who have without hesitation put communal life above the solitary. They urge us to hurry towards life in community if we want to attain the heights of perfection. It is not necessary to say much by way of argument against such folk, since the only life they approve is the one they want to practise, or at least know something about. In other words

¹⁶⁶ De la Roncière, 'La place des confréries'.

¹⁶⁷ Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, 'The cult of angels in late fifteenth-century England: an Hours of the Guardian Angel presented to Queen Elizabeth Woodville', in Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor, eds, *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence* (Toronto, 1996), 230–65, at pp. 242, 244–5.

they do not approve of the solitary life because they know nothing about it. It is a life which no one who 'lives in the flesh' can know, but only he to whom it has been given by God. No one can assess it rightly who is uncertain about it and the way it works. I do not doubt that if they did in fact have some knowledge of the life, it would be this life they would be praising rather than the other.¹⁶⁸

The social Christianity of the guilds did not, therefore, go unchallenged; nor was it to be taken for granted. Those who drew up and who opted to subscribe to the ethical imperatives of the fraternities made conscious choices, based upon a presumption of the intrinsic value of human interaction in society.

The ethic of the guilds, which touched at once the form of the liturgy, the public mediation of the gospel in pastoral teaching, and the conduct of personal life, was typically expressed in the declared aims of a guild founded at Upwell in Norfolk in 1327. The members would devote their resources to the decoration of the Virgin Mary's altar in the parish church with pictures, carvings, altarpieces, and candlesticks, and would meanwhile apply themselves to the cultivation of fraternal love and charity between one another, 'as behoved good Christians'.¹⁶⁹ At the same period the members of a guild at Lynn in the same county cited St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: 'Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' The same society introduced its call to charity with a reference to the exemplary moral story of the Good Samaritan.¹⁷⁰ The educational initiatives of the guilds included the retention of preachers: a fraternity at Charing Cross in the early sixteenth century invited a different speaker each year to give a sermon on the occasion of the principal feast.¹⁷¹ The didactic efforts of diocesan and parochial clergy were further complemented by a variety of plays and other imagery supplied by the guilds. The story of the Yorkshire-born St Helen's discovery of the Cross of Christ was related both in a dramatic procession presented by a guild at Beverley and in a cycle of wall-paintings in the chapel of the Holy Cross guild at Stratford-upon-Avon.¹⁷² In many of the extant guild registers children are recorded as joining the societies together

¹⁶⁸ Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, transl. Clifton Wolters (Harmondsworth, 1972), 82. The popularity of the *Incendium amoris* is shown by the survival of forty medieval copies. Rolle was not canonized but miracles were reported at his shrine.

¹⁶⁹ TNA: PRO C 47/44/337.

¹⁷⁰ Norwich, Norfolk County Record Office, MS King's Lynn Gd.81; cf. 1 Cor. 10.31. Although organized by clerks of Lynn, this guild included lay members, both male and female.

¹⁷¹ Westminster Abbey Muniment Room, MS accounts of the guild of St Mary Rounceval at Charing Cross, 1520–4, 1538–40 (bound with records of another guild), unnumbered.

¹⁷² TNA: PRO C 47/46/448; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 148; T. Fisher, *Ancient Allegorical, Historical, and Legendary Paintings, in Fresco, discovered in . . . 1804, on the Walls of the Chapel of the Trinity, belonging to the Gilde of the Holy Cross, at Stratford-upon-Avon* (London, 1838); Clifford Davidson, *The Guild Chapel Wall Paintings at Stratford-upon-Avon* (New York, 1988); Kate Giles, Anthony Masinton, and Geoff Arnott, 'Visualising the Guild Chapel, Stratford-upon-Avon: digital models as research tools in buildings archaeology', *Internet Archaeology*, 32 (2012).

with their parents.¹⁷³ The ethical practices of mutual support, charity, and prayer were in such instances acquired early, enabling the guild member to forge an identity over the course of a lifetime in the language and against the measure of these ideals.

CHARITY

The charity of the medieval guilds was motivated in part by members' concerns for their own souls, and to have the benefit of the prayers of those whom they helped. At the same time this assistance was both active and practical. The York Paternoster guild put into words the vital distinction between a symbolic gesture and positive ethics:

The mere gathering of the faithful is vain unless it is directed towards some work of charity.¹⁷⁴

The exercise of charitable functions fostered amongst members a sense of social responsibility and ethical purpose. The ambition for the guild to be a moral leaven both for its own membership and for the larger secular community was expressed in a Norfolk guild in this statement of its aims:

To promote charity amongst men and to bring to perfection the seven works of mercy and the holy works of the Church.¹⁷⁵

The broad terms of this rhetoric of guild charity did not change between c.1300 and c.1500. Neither the pastoral efforts of the clergy nor the activities of the guilds themselves appear to have significantly altered the terms in which charity was distributed during these two centuries. Recent research has even gone so far as to show a significant degree of continuity in the local basis of charitable organization extending across the period of the Reformation, from the later Middle Ages into the seventeenth century.¹⁷⁶ Yet historians have also detected an increasing concern, towards the end of the medieval period, to target assistance effectively to those perceived as genuinely in need. 'Idle beggars' who would not work, or those who had become needy as a result of their own immorality, were not deemed worthy of help, either by guilds or other benefactors.¹⁷⁷ This discrimination has been seen as motivated by a

¹⁷³ e.g. *Register of the Guild of Holy Cross . . . Stratford-upon-Avon*, 88, 136.

¹⁷⁴ TNA: PRO C 47/46/454.

¹⁷⁵ TNA: PRO C 47/44/311: the guild of St Christopher at Outwell.

¹⁷⁶ Marjorie K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370–1600* (Cambridge, 1998), 196; McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England: 1350–1600* (Cambridge, 2012).

¹⁷⁷ e.g. TNA: PRO C 47/41/191; printed in Barron and Wright, 'The London Middle English guild certificates', 134. This discriminatory moral concern running through the records of the

perception that vagrancy was increasing with the generally increased mobility which resulted from demographic decline, and by a concomitant desire to focus assistance upon the needy neighbour whose credentials could the more easily be trusted.¹⁷⁸ In many cases, as a result, the recipient of fraternity support in the long fifteenth century would be already familiar to the members of the charitable society.

The discriminatory selection of the deserving poor and the imposition upon recipients of charity of intercessory prayers for the benefactors of the guild has led one scholar to write of 'the shift from communal and cooperative forms of charitable organization towards a more personal and individual search for religious and social benefits'. It has been further asserted that the fraternities prioritized prayers for their own members so that the poor 'were no longer lodged, fed, and cared for but rather . . . appended to funerary and commemorative occasions'.¹⁷⁹ Yet in view of the sheer quantity of collaborative charitable enterprises initiated in the later Middle Ages by parishes and especially by guilds, it is hard to see the evidence as sustaining this argument for a more 'individualistic' outlook.¹⁸⁰ The increased focus upon those at risk within the neighbourhood, which is indicated by much if not all of the late-medieval evidence for charity, may be interpreted more convincingly as requiring a greater 'sense of individual responsibility'¹⁸¹ on the part of the guild member, while at the same time building inescapable personal connections between the fraternity of donors and those whom they helped. Falling population and rising standards of living in the later Middle Ages contributed to a shift of the primary emphasis in charity from the anonymous vagrant to the elderly and the reputable poor, the known victims of misfortune, in local society.¹⁸² However, rather than fragmenting charitable giving into the solipsistic acts

late-medieval guilds is particularly noted also by Ben R. McRee, 'Religious gilds and regulation of behaviour in late medieval towns', in Joel Rosenthal and Colin Richmond, eds, *People, Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages* (Gloucester, 1987), 108–22; and by Frank Rexroth, *Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London*, transl. Pamela E. Selwyn (Cambridge, 2007), 169–71.

¹⁷⁸ Michel Mollat, *Les pauvres au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1978), 328–52; Miri Rubin, 'The poor', in Rosemary Horrox, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1994), 169–82, at p. 182.

¹⁷⁹ Miri Rubin, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1987), 295.

¹⁸⁰ See also the remarks on this issue by Patricia H. Cullum, "'For poor people harberles": what was the function of the *maisonsdieu*?'", in D. J. Clayton, R. G. Davies and P. McNiven, eds, *Trade, Devotion and Government: Papers in Late Medieval History* (Gloucester, 1994), 36–54.

¹⁸¹ Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), 240.

¹⁸² Marjorie K. McIntosh, 'Local responses to the poor in late medieval and Tudor England', *Continuity and Change*, 3 (1998), 209–45, esp. pp. 213–17; Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), ch. 9, esp. pp. 242–7; Carole Rawcliffe, 'Dives redeemed? The guild almshouses of later medieval England', in Linda Clark, ed., *Rule, Redemption and Representation in Late Medieval England and France* (Woodbridge, 2008), 1–27.

of private individuals, the sources relating to the guilds suggest that the response to late-medieval social change was to make the individual member more conscious of the vulnerability of his or her neighbours, and to foster the development of personal ties with those who were helped. In this greater focus upon the known recipient of charity, it may be argued that there was an enlarged potential to disturb the complacency of the giver. This was Karamazov's paradox: the beggar with whom one is thrust into intimate contact is a more upsetting catalyst of personal change than a faceless and conveniently distant good cause.

It must be underlined that while charity was meaningless without a recipient, and guild philanthropy certainly made a positive difference to many individual lives, the overriding purpose was not to create a welfare institution capable of meeting specific material requirements, but rather to cultivate, in the members themselves and potentially in those outside the society who were inspired by their example, habits of compassion and generosity in relationships with others. If the quantity of distributions were to be measured against the scale of the material need, the judgement would have to be negative: the levels of giving declared by fraternities in their returns to the survey in 1388–9 were not always maintained in practice, and all available medieval welfare institutions together were incapable of rising to the challenge.¹⁸³ The selective approach to giving which tended to prevail in the fraternities left large numbers of the destitute beyond the pale of guild charity. But with these important qualifications duly made, fraternal charity may also be considered, in its own terms, as a formative ethical practice deliberately and carefully undertaken by the members.

Guild charity in the later Middle Ages ranged across a spectrum of relationships with diverse recipients. In each case, the encounter was fostered both to relieve the needy and to educate the giver. The image of the anonymous pauper as Christ-like and deserving of indiscriminate assistance tended to give way everywhere in the course of the fourteenth century to a more discriminate concern with poverty as a human condition which could affect anyone.¹⁸⁴ The effect was not to narrow the scope of charity but to make it more reflective. Duly considered, the bond created between the guild member and the recipient of charity was of a quite different order from the relatively superficial relationship between the alms-giver and the altogether unknown poor. Within the potential range of this thoughtful attention was the unfortunate stranger. The Stratford-upon-Avon guild of the Holy Cross reported in 1388–9 that if

¹⁸³ McRee, 'Charity and guild solidarity'; Barron, 'Parish fraternities', 27; Christopher Dyer, 'Poverty and its relief in late medieval England', *Past and Present*, 216 (2012), 41–78.

¹⁸⁴ Luciano Orioli, *Le confraternite medievali e il problema della povertà. Lo statuto della Compagnia di Santa Maria Vergine e di San Zenobio di Firenze nel secolo XIV* (Rome, 1984), esp. pp. 90–1; Mollat, *Les pauvres*.

any poor person in the town, or any stranger, 'whosoever he may be', were to die without the means to secure his or her burial, then the brothers and sisters of the fraternity would provide four candles to burn before the body, a winding-sheet, and a hearse-cloth to cover the coffin until the burial was done.¹⁸⁵ In the same year this guild accounted for a winding-sheet bought for 'a certain poor person out of the alms of the brotherhood'; the proper burial of the very poor would continue to be a concern of the company.¹⁸⁶ The same guild maintained an almshouse, rebuilt in the early fifteenth century (Fig. 2), in which, for example, two poor men called Adam and Henley were housed in 1410–11; an anonymous 'poor woman' was kept in 1412–13; in 1427–8 Thomas Gyles and Alice Berford were nursed until their death and burial at the fraternity's charge; and in 1475–6 the inmates included 'Agnes, a girl in the almshouse', and Robert Scot and John Dunseprowe, for whose attendance Margaret Myller received a reward from the guild.¹⁸⁷ At the end of the Middle Ages a category of small hospitals continued to be maintained by fraternities, such as the almshouse of the guild of St Mary of Rounceval at Westminster, which welcomed the sick or impoverished migrant stranger. This modest establishment at Charing Cross offered nine or ten beds and washing facilities and 1*d.* a day for sustenance. Its inmates were evidently living on the margins of life in London. In 1520–2 they included:

Christopher Smith, a sick man lying in the almshouse (11 days)
 A poor man whom Thomas Wyld sent thither (3 days)
 Hanger, a sick man (4 days)
 A lad that went on his knees (10 days)
 A lad that died in the almshouse, who lay there sick for 3 days
 John Foster that lay in the street, for fetching him into the almshouse and 2 days lying sick
 A Scottish man called Thomas A Ley that died in the almshouse, having lain sick 2 days
 A Dutchman (8 days)
 Robert: lay sick 3 days and died

The anonymity of some of those helped, and their foreign origins—as in the cases of the Scot and the Dutchman and others in subsequent years—indicate that these were not naturally members of the local community. Yet local people, members and supporters of the guild, cared for them, as for instance did Katherine Phillips, a barber's widow. A close neighbour of the hospital, she

¹⁸⁵ TNA: PRO C 47/46/440; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 212–19.

¹⁸⁶ Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, MS BRT 1/3/4. In 1406–7 Henry Bedeman was paid for ringing the bell through the town when 'a poor woman' who had died was buried at the guild's expense. BRT 1/3/21.

¹⁸⁷ Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, MS BRT 1/3/25, 1/3/27, 1/3/20, 1/3/39 1/3/88 (cited references to almsmen and almswomen); 1/3/26 (major building expenses on rebuilding the almshouse during the 1410s).

expected to be buried in the adjacent fraternity chapel of St Mary Rounceval, beside her first husband. At her death in 1504, Katherine bequeathed to the inmates of the hospital a feather bed with a bolster, sheets, blankets, and a coverlet.¹⁸⁸ The effect of the guild's attention in each of these cases was to adopt vulnerable people into the family of the association, thereby incorporating them into local society. Such relationships have the potential to be patronizing and even humiliating for those assisted; but the countervailing argument in this context was that the needy provided guild members with a lesson in humility and an opportunity to use the encounter to enlarge their own sensibilities.

No less potentially unsettling to the guild member was to recognize and to bring practical assistance to their sick, unemployed, or infirm neighbour. Between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries, there developed an increased emphasis in the fraternities upon the known recipient of charity. This was a finding of Catherine Vincent in her study of fraternities in late-medieval Normandy, and the English evidence is indicative of a similar shift.¹⁸⁹ To prioritize the morally respectable recipient known to the giver can be seen as an indirect means of social control, by confining support to undisruptive elements. From an ethical point of view, however, the familiar neighbour in need was a present and constant reminder both of the mutual relationship created by the initial act of charity and of the possibility, given late-medieval realities, that the giver, too, could in the future find him- or herself in need of similar assistance. The Ludlow palmers' (or pilgrims') guild, founded in the 1280s, recorded in the late fourteenth century its provision for the aid of members who fell, as was implicitly regarded as inevitable in some cases, on hard times:

When it happens that any of the brothers or sisters of the guild has been brought to such a state of need, whether through theft, fire, shipwreck, the collapse of a house or any other mishap, that he or she does not have enough to live on, then once, twice and three times, but not a fourth time, as much help shall be given to them, out of the goods of the guild, as the rector and stewards, having regard to the deserts of each, and to the means of the guild, shall order—so that whoever bears the name of this guild shall be raised up again through the ordinances, goods and help of his or her brethren.¹⁹⁰

The guild of St John the Baptist at Lynn was clear in its insistence, in its statutes of 1369, that the first lesson in charity was to be derived from one's neighbours and associates: 'We are more obliged to our fellow brothers and

¹⁸⁸ Westminster Abbey Muniment Room, Accounts of the guild of St Mary Rounceval at Charing Cross, 1520–2; Rosser, *Medieval Westminster*, 317–19.

¹⁸⁹ Vincent, *Des charités bien ordonnées*, 168–70.

¹⁹⁰ TNA: PRO C 47/45/392; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 13.

sisters than to others.¹⁹¹ This society's concern that its own members, in particular, should not be reduced to 'public beggary' resonates closely with that of Italian guilds dedicated to the assistance of the *poveri vergognosi*, or 'shame-faced poor'. The Florentine Buonomini di San Martino gave discreet help in particular to relatively poor artisans, who in this case were not members of the confraternity but who were identified as being at risk of falling into mendicancy and consequently of losing public trust and hence their ability to work.¹⁹² At Lübeck, also, a number of fraternities towards the end of the Middle Ages organized regular handouts to individuals who, while neither members of the brotherhoods nor yet in a condition of absolute poverty, were known to be deserving: once on the rota, these would continue in receipt of support until death.¹⁹³ Precepts which gave priority to preserving the public dignity of the society's own membership, or to neighbours who were not destitute but at risk of becoming so, may be seen as tending to preserve the social status quo.¹⁹⁴ But they also contained the potential to precipitate that first opening out of the individual fraternity member to contact and exchange with another person which could in turn catalyse the formation of a new, and stronger, ethical identity.

Guild charity took diverse and creative forms. The guild of St Catherine in the church of the Holy Trinity, Cambridge, in the early sixteenth century made financial loans at interest to its members, the profits from which were allocated to brothers and sisters in need.¹⁹⁵ In the late-medieval world in which credit was the ubiquitous basis of economic survival, many other guilds advanced loans to their associates.¹⁹⁶ Very many also offered free support to tide a member over a period of hardship. A brother or sister of the guild of Our Lady's Nativity at Wymondham, in Norfolk, who fell sick, would in principle receive 1*d.* a day from the company: more than enough to feed an individual, if not for a family.¹⁹⁷ Elsewhere impoverished brethren were offered contributions of a dole of ¼*d.* a day and ½*d.* on Sundays; a gift of ½*d.* or 2*d.* from each other member, or 1*d.* monthly from each of the brothers and sisters; basic clothing; or hospitality in the house of one of the others of the fraternity.¹⁹⁸ In

¹⁹¹ Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, King's Lynn MS Gd.81.

¹⁹² Amleto Spicciani, 'The "poveri vergognosi" in fifteenth-century Florence: the first 30 years' activity of the Buonomini di S. Martino', in Thomas Riis, ed., *Aspects of Poverty in Early Modern Europe* (Florence, 1981), 119–82.

¹⁹³ Monika Zmyslony, *Die Bruderschaften in Lübeck bis zur Reformation* (Kiel, 1977), 129 ff.

¹⁹⁴ This is the emphasis of Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, 246–67.

¹⁹⁵ M. Siraut, 'Accounts of Saint Katherine's guild at Holy Trinity church, Cambridge: 1514–1537', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 67 (1977), 111–21.

¹⁹⁶ See Chapter 5.

¹⁹⁷ Wymondham, Norfolk, parish church of St Mary, MS Rules of the guild of Our Lady's Nativity (1415–16).

¹⁹⁸ TNA: PRO C 47/38/45; C 47/38/47; *English Guilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 38; C 47/38/48; C 47/45/373.

some cases, this material assistance was only forthcoming to the member of several years' standing, as in the case of St Anne's guild in St Lawrence Jewry in London, in which only those who had paid their subscriptions for five years were eligible for the (quite generous) weekly allowance in need of 10½d.¹⁹⁹ Like support was provided in the event of sickness, when healthy members undertook, in turns, to pay bedside visits on the unwell, or to assist in other ways those whose families were struck by the plague;²⁰⁰ and many guilds offered the additional security of an almshouse run by the society.

Many of the numerous almshouses of late-medieval England originated as the creations of fraternities acting as collectivities, and they were a core element of their ethical programme. In the case of the almshouse for thirteen paupers built by the Abingdon guild of the Holy Cross on the edge of St Helen's churchyard in 1446, the inmates were to be chosen by the society and to become, *ipso facto*, members of the fraternity.²⁰¹ The Boston guild of St Mary, in addition to making variable weekly distributions to particular named paupers of the town, received into its almshouse at the turn of the sixteenth century non-members of the guild who submitted petitions for the places. This was known as the 'bedehouse', a name which recalls the reciprocal obligation upon all the recipients of these acts of charity to offer up regular bidding prayers for the souls of their benefactors: givers and receivers were bound in a mutual commitment.²⁰² Where recipients were themselves guild members, charity was intended to protect their participation. Thus a London girdler, Andrew Hunte, in 1431 provided for two 'decayed persons of the livery', dependent on the guild almshouse, to be allocated hoods so that they should be properly dressed and therefore able to take their place at fraternity feasts as full members of the community.²⁰³ The Westminster guild of the Virgin Mary's Assumption managed a row of five cottages off King Street (the present Whitehall) as an almshouse, known as Our Lady's Row, whose more-or-less long-term occupants would be non-guild members but well-known in the neighbourhood: in 1490 the 'bede-folk' were Mother Benett, James Kyrk's wife, Agnes Tapster, Alison Trougge, and Courte Folkyn, and each received

¹⁹⁹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, London Rolls, 2; printed in Barron and Wright, 'The London Middle English guild certificates of 1388–9', 123.

²⁰⁰ TNA: PRO C 47/39/71; C 47/46/448; Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, MS King's Lynn Gd.81.

²⁰¹ Francis Little, *A Monument of Christian Munificence* (n.p., 1872), 18; Arthur E. Preston, *Christ's Hospital Abingdon: The Almshouses, the Hall and the Portraits* (Oxford, n.d. [1930]), 15. On this guild see further Chapter 6.

²⁰² British Library, MS Egerton 2886, Accounts of the Boston guild of St Mary, early 16th century, fols 5^v, 81^v, 274^v.

²⁰³ Matthew Davies, 'The tailors of London: corporate charity in the late medieval town', in Rowena E. Archer, ed., *Crown, Government and People in the Fifteenth Century* (Stroud, 1995), 161–90, at p. 173.

from the guild, in addition to their lodgings, 6s. 8d. a quarter for their keep.²⁰⁴ Sometimes a guild would take over the running of an established hospital. In 1424, most of the membership of the guild of St George in Salisbury agreed to support the existing hospital of the Holy Trinity, forming a special fraternity for the purpose and each pledging sums of 4d. or 8d. a year for its upkeep.²⁰⁵

A further trend which stands out in the later Middle Ages is the founding of almshouses by leading townsmen who chose to entrust the permanent management of the institution to a guild. The fraternities—to a greater degree, in this period, than the monasteries which in earlier centuries had dominated the field—were evidently perceived as having a responsible and long-term commitment to charitable provision. The pattern is exemplified by a Salisbury draper, Degory Watur, who, having founded a small hospital, was said to have ‘dwelt in the almshouse hall there amongst them [the poor] and would also kneel amongst them in the same church in a fair long pew made for them and himself’. The accounts of the drapers’ fraternity in Salisbury confirm his care for the inmates, including ‘Dogus with one eye’, whose coat was bought for him in 1465. On Watur’s death in 1477 this almshouse was committed to the management of his guild.²⁰⁶

While the scale of need was certainly beyond the available provision for the poor, the quantity of hospices maintained by guilds and by small groups of neighbours in the late Middle Ages was not negligible. In York around 1500, five guild hospitals are recorded, together with a further eighteen small almshouses known as *maisonsdieu*.²⁰⁷ Each of these identified the poor not as an anonymous crowd but as known individuals, with whom the founders and maintainers of these modest institutions entered into a reciprocal relationship. Similarly the Trinity guild of Lynn, which in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century commanded relatively extensive resources and distributed up to around £20 a year on alms, kept precise records of the variable distributions made to its dependants living in the town, including the following in 1373–4:

The anchoress of South Lynn 20s
 Clarice Sorel, a poor woman 6s 8d
 Little John with the broken back 6s 8d
 The hermit of the chapel of St Nicholas 5s . . .²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Westminster Abbey Muniment Room, Accounts of the guild of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, *sub annis* 1487–90; Rosser, *Medieval Westminster*, 320–1.

²⁰⁵ Andrew Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury 1250–1550* (Oxford, 1995), 181, 192.

²⁰⁶ Rawcliffe, ‘Dives redeemed?’, 16–17. For the general point, see also Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital*, 62–3.

²⁰⁷ Patricia H. Cullum and P. J. P. Goldberg, ‘Charitable provision in late medieval York: “To the praise of God and the use of the poor”’, *Northern History*, 29 (1993), 24–39.

²⁰⁸ Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, MS King’s Lynn C38/1; and C38/1–31 *passim*. In its return to the royal inquiry in 1388–9, the Lynn guild of the Trinity had stated that it distributed

Helping the needy in their midst, the entertainment of the apostolic number of thirteen poor guests at the guild feast (as for example at Gedney in Lincolnshire),²⁰⁹ or the construction of a bridge to benefit the whole community (at Langport in Somerset a fraternity maintained the bridge of thirty stone arches),²¹⁰ gave to the brothers and sisters of a fraternity direct contact with those in need of help, experience of realizing a moral initiative, and an empowering sense of public worth. All of these actions were undertaken with a conscious address both to the members within the group and to those outside it. The repeatedly expressed concern for the public reputation of the society served the status of its members in material terms; but it also highlighted the perceived potential for the company to inspire those outside it to echo its ideals and its practices. A guild of Notre Dame at Fanjeaux in Provence in the late thirteenth century put this into words in a statute requiring the members to carry candles in the funeral procession of a deceased brother or sister,

as a sign that they belong to the confraternity [and so that] others may see this along with the other good things done [by the society] and in order that they may [be inspired to] pray to the Virgin.²¹¹

Standing in the collective glow of moral approbation enjoyed by the guild on account of its public investment of the membership fees (great or small as these were in particular cases), the individual could begin to reap both the material and the moral, the external and the internal, rewards of personal participation, through the fraternity, in the social arena.

CONCLUSION

In its external aspect, the moral definition of the guild was a guarantee of social respectability. The social credit conferred by affiliation to a fraternity bears close comparison with the 'certificate of moral qualification' which Max

£30 annually in alms. For this return see William Richards, *The History of Lynn* (Lynn, 1812), 452–3. Disbursements recorded in the annual accounts between the late 14th and early 16th centuries were less than this, and they tended to decline across the period; but in the early 1400s they could be a little more substantial than was indicated by McRee, 'Charity and gild solidarity'. In 1406–7 (MS KL C38/7), the handouts (to a total of 49 individuals) for the four quarters totalled £22 2s. 0d.

²⁰⁹ TNA: PRO C 47/40/106.

²¹⁰ *The Survey and Rental of the Chantries, Colleges and Free Chapels, Guilds, Fraternities, Lamps, Lights and Obits in the County of Somerset*, ed. Emanuel Green, Somerset Record Society, ii (1888), 114–15.

²¹¹ A. Ramière de Fortanier, 'La confrérie Notre Dame de Fanjeaux et son développement au Moyen Âge', *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*, 11 (1976), 321–56, at pp. 324–5.

Weber described as accruing to the member of a Protestant sect in the centuries after the Reformation.²¹² Membership of a guild, whether powerful or humble in economic and political terms, was an assurance of credit and status in society. Given the social capital which could attach to the positive image of the guild, we are not required to believe that new recruits were always drawn in by entirely altruistic ideals. It is evident that the potential motives of any individual for joining a guild included superficial material advantage, and a cynical ambition for worldly advancement. But the regular practice of public charity and communal prayer, which were the requirements of fraternity membership, encouraged the individual member, who was by definition an active contributor to the positive image of the association, to come to believe in the attractive portrait of her- or himself as a virtuous individual. Even this belief might at first be superficial: a shallow and convenient self-deceit, representing no more than the internalization and masking of an essentially solipsistic motive. But beyond the initial and external commitment, the practice of regular participation in the ritual calendar and charitable works of the guild had the potential to cultivate a moral relationship with others both within and beyond the group, and in turn to shape the individual member as an ethical subject. Participation in a medieval guild was not, and was not intended to be, an entirely comfortable experience. In an unstable world, the fraternities offered a respectable standing in local society to recruits who in many cases were otherwise deprived of the certainties of a family or a small village left behind in the quest for work and a living. By the same token, however, the memberships of the guilds had reason to be highly sensitized to the fragility of all human fortunes. This awareness was the beginning of an ability to identify with others both within and beyond the fraternity: to touch, and even to embrace one's neighbour, and through that contact to lay oneself open to being changed.

²¹² Max Weber, 'The protestant sects and the spirit of capitalism', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, transl. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London, 1948), 305–6.



Fig. 3 Communal drinking-horn (auroch's horn), early fourteenth century with seventeenth-century additions. Probably once of the Cambridge guild of Corpus Christi. Photo: With kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

3

Friendship

Virtue, without which friendship is impossible, is first; but next to it, and to it alone, the greatest of all things is friendship.

Cicero, *On Friendship*¹

HISTORICIZING FRIENDSHIP

The members of the guild of St James in the church of the same dedication at Garlickhithe in London, responding to the 1388–9 survey, declared that the primary goal of their society, since its foundation thirteen years before, had been

for amendment of their lives and of their souls, and to nourish more love between the brethren and the sisters of the brotherhood.²

The fostering of affection amongst the members was a universally expressed goal of the fraternities. What was intended by these declarations? It was argued in the previous chapter that the founders of medieval guilds understood ethics to be the outcome of a lived and continually renewed encounter and exchange with others. Our ability, however, to understand this culture—together with many others outside our own—is peculiarly hampered by currently received ideas about the value, the autonomy, and the privacy of the individual. The prevailing force of post-Enlightenment liberal individualism imposes upon ethics a distinction between the collective values of society and what is alleged to be the ‘true interest’ of the autonomous self. Actions in the name of the former are measured by the test of the latter. Even communitarian thinkers tend to subscribe to the view that the ultimate value is the independent freedom of the individual. Charles Taylor, who as an opponent of the atomism

¹ Cicero, *De amicitia*, c.27, in *Cicero De senectute, De amicitia, De divinatione*, ed. W. A. Falconer (London, 1959), 210–11.

² The National Archives (TNA): PRO C 47/41/191; printed in Joshua Toulmin Smith and Lucy Toulmin Smith, eds, *English Gilds*, Early English Text Society, original series, 40 (1870), 3.

fostered by individualistic ideals has argued powerfully that the full development of personhood is dependent upon human interaction in society, nevertheless sees the goal of human life as the achievement of personal freedom, self-possession, and self-direction, and an ability to distinguish what is in one's own interest from what is socially required.³ This concept of the inner or 'true self', to which is ascribed a degree of authenticity superior to the self when compromised by its engagement with society, needs to be historicized: it is not, and has not been, shared by other cultures. The modern cult of the immured self is challenged by diverse traditions in which friendship has been understood as a process whereby the self opens itself into and is received by another. Greek philosophy urged that 'a friend is another himself'.⁴ Greek and Roman commentators also regarded friendship as a public virtue, and a crucial foundation of politics. The marginalization of friendship in modern Western culture, as a supposedly private matter quite distinct from political relations in society, represents a deliberate turn away from this earlier tradition.⁵

Christianity problematized the subject by introducing an inclusive language of love for all, or *agapē*, which potentially threw into question the relationship of *philia*, or affection for the preferred friend. However, Christian thinkers came to understand particular friendship as the means through which the individual could arrive at a more embracing love for others and for God: *philia* and *agapē* converged in the Christian virtue of *caritas*.⁶ Medieval religious arguments upheld friendship as a means to break down the selfishness of individual isolation. As was noted in the last chapter, the late-medieval discourse of Christian ethics ascribed supreme importance to the salvation of the individual soul; yet it understood that outcome as being absolutely dependent upon the mutual intercourse of people in the world. For this reason, the companionship which was fostered by the guilds was not an otiose adjunct of their activities: it was essential to their identity and purpose.

In the post-Romantic West, the discourse of friendship has promoted it as a private, not a public, virtue. This is partly seen in the conflation of 'friend' with 'best friend', categories deliberately distinguished by other and earlier cultures.

³ Charles Taylor, 'Atomism', in his *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1985), 187–210; 'What's wrong with negative liberty', in Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, 211–29. The same observation regarding Taylor's argument is made by Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, 2005), 150.

⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. and ed. Terence Irwin, 2nd edn (Indianapolis, IN, 1999), 150 (IX.9). So also Cicero, *De amicitia*, c.7, ed. Falconer, 132–3: 'He who looks upon a true friend, looks, as it were, upon a sort of image of himself.'

⁵ Stephen Salkever, 'Taking friendship seriously: Aristotle on the place(s) of *philia* in human life', in John von Heyking and Richard Avramenko, eds, *Friendship and Politics: Essays in Political Thought* (Notre Dame, IN, 2008), 53–83.

⁶ Eoin G. Cassidy, '"He who has friends can have no friend": Classical and Christian perspectives on the limits to friendship', in Julian Haseldine, ed., *Friendship in Medieval Europe* (Stroud, 1999), 45–67.

Here and now, intimate dyadic relationships of close friends threaten to occupy the entire field, crowding out other forms and possibilities of friendship.⁷ As Jacques Derrida has argued, the marginalization of the social power of friends in the modern world is not a politically innocent process.⁸ A longer historical perspective reveals the potential of friendship for the ethical construction of bonds in society. Aristotle said: 'If people are friends, they have no need of justice.'⁹ To the antique philosophical analysis of the rational motives for making friends, Christianity adduced a religious argument for behaving as if one were friends with other people, as the starting point for the creation of society. The present chapter explores the consequences of this double inheritance of ideas and practice of friendship for the formation of guilds. Outside the confines of monastic and certain narrowly defined intellectual circles, friendship in the Middle Ages has not hitherto attracted much scholarly attention. Yet in its context, it was ascribed the highest importance. And beyond its historical interest, it has something to contribute to modern discussion about the nature of individuality, the interrelationship of selves, and the foundation of political society.¹⁰

To identify a positive discourse of friendship in the late Middle Ages may appear to be a naïve rehearsal of a long outdated, romantically idealized view of that epoch. Medieval society was imagined as an escapist fantasy of universal friendship long before the medievalist revival of the nineteenth century. Writing towards the end of the sixteenth century, the Londoner John Stow looked back nostalgically to the Midsummer festivals in the City at the time of his youth in the 1530s:

There were usually made bonfires in the streets, every man bestowing wood or labour towards them. The wealthier sort, also, before their doors . . . would set out tables . . . furnished with sweet bread and good drink, and on the festival days with meats and drinks plentifully, whereunto they would invite their neighbours and passengers also to sit and be merry with them in great familiarity, praising God for his benefits bestowed on them. These were called *bonfires* as well of good amity amongst neighbours that, being before at controversy, were there by the labour of others reconciled and made, of bitter enemies, loving friends . . .¹¹

⁷ On the history of dyadic friendship, see Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago and London, 2003).

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* [1994], transl. George Collins (London, 1997), esp. pp. 271–308.

⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. and ed. Irwin, 120 (VIII.1).

¹⁰ Some of the ideas in this chapter were first developed in Gervase Rosser, 'Party list: making friends in the medieval English guilds', in Matthew Davies and Andrew Prescott, eds, *London and the Kingdom: Essays in Honour of Caroline M. Barron* (Donington, 2008), 118–34; and in Rosser, 'Finding oneself in a medieval fraternity: individual and collective identities in the English guilds', in Monika Escher-Apsner, ed., *Mittelalterliche Bruderschaften in europäischen Städten* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), 255–91.

¹¹ John Stow, *A Survey of London* [1598], ed. Charles L. Kingsford, 2 vols (Oxford, 1908), ii. 101 (spelling and punctuation modernized).

The antidote, however, to ahistorical idealization is to hand in the writings of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century preachers and social satirists. Typical of many, a homilist in c.1400 denounced the widespread absence of Christian charity and friendship:

When the fiend sees love and peace among good men, he has thereto much envy and does all that he can or may, and with the fire of ire he stirs their hearts to discord and strife . . . After strife comes chiding, with great noise and crying. And right as fire casts first up smoke and afterwards bursts into flame, right so after ire and evil will come strife and debate. And when one says to another 'It is thus', the other says 'Nay!' The one says 'It was thus!' the other says 'It was not so!' Thus begins strife, and after that comes chiding, with 'Thou liest' and 'Thou liest' . . . [leading to] menaces or threatenings, which stir men's hearts to ire so that battles and wars begin amongst them, and cease not until one of them be avenged of the other.¹²

Similar jeremiads circulated also in other media, including William Langland's *Piers Plowman* of c.1370–80, in which the figure of Wrath boasts of disguising himself as a cook and setting nuns in a convent to argue with one another:

Of wykked words I, Wrath, here wortes [*their soup*] imade,
Til "thou lixte" [*liest*] and "thou lixte" lopen out at ones,
And eyther hitte other vnder the cheke;
Hadde they had knyues, bi Cryst, her eyther had killed other.¹³

Friendship was therefore no more taken for granted in this late-medieval context than at other periods. It was, rather, a fragile value perceived to be at risk, and in need of vindication. This was a challenge taken up by the guilds.

AN EMOTIONAL HISTORY

This late-medieval current of moral condemnation of anger and violence helps us to see the communitarian ideal of the period in a less idealized light. Yet to place love and friendship together with hatred and anger is to perceive that all of these feelings need to be considered within an evolving history of the emotions. This raises further questions about how to interpret the language of love and friendship (and their opposites) within the guilds. Understanding of the emotions in any human context has taken a decisive turn since the

¹² Cit. G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1961), 459. Owst also refers to the passage in *Piers Plowman* cited in the following note.

¹³ William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B text, Passus V, ll. 162–5, in William Langland, *Piers Plowman. The Prologue and Passus I–VIII of the B text as found in Bodleian Ms. Laud Misc. 581*, ed. J. A. W. Bennett (Oxford, 1972), 41.

realization that emotional responses are cognitive: so far from being (as used to be assumed) primitive, child-like and opposed to reason, they form part of an intelligent process of subjective assessment of a particular state of affairs.¹⁴ Like thoughts, emotions are at once engaged with external human relations and part of a person's interior aspect. Their outward expression is always, to some degree, formalized, part of a language understood by others. The need to historicize that language of the emotions, whose connotations have varied across time and cultures, has led to the identification of distinct 'emotional communities'.¹⁵

Early in the Christian tradition, Augustine established an example of friendship which would remain influential throughout the later medieval period. In the *Confessions*, Augustine wrote of the way in which a close friendship exposes the self to another to a point of emotional vulnerability, such that each person affects the character of the other, either for good or ill. The loss of a dear friend left the youthful Augustine stricken ('the heart ... flooded with tears'), destabilized and directionless, until he came to the realization that his feeling for his friend, rightly directed, had all along been love of God. That insight enabled him to overcome his sense of loss and to see divinity in all loving human relationships: 'Though left alone, he loses none dear to him, for all are dear in the one who cannot be lost.'¹⁶ This model of Christian friendship which through mutual exposure transforms the individual and leads, through the action of love for other human beings, to God, would shape the philosophy of the later medieval fraternities.

In the thirteenth century, this Augustinian basis for the understanding of human relationships was significantly amplified by the reading, by Bacon, Peckham, and Aquinas, of Aristotle.¹⁷ Where the Church Fathers, Augustine included, had tended to underline the ultimate separation between the body and the mind or soul of the Christian,¹⁸ the encounter with Aristotle's natural philosophy encouraged the later theologians of Paris and Oxford to embrace a more unified view, and to identify a direct continuity between the body and the

¹⁴ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upeavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001).

¹⁵ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 2006); Rosenwein, 'Thinking historically about medieval emotions', *History Compass*, 8/8 (2010), 828–42.

¹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. and ed. Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1991), 56–61 (IV.4–9).

¹⁷ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy* (London, 1972), 153–9, 199–212; David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (London, 1962), 185–234; Norman Kretzmann and Anthony Kenny, eds, *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Recovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600* (Cambridge, 1982), 43–98, 521–36, and esp. 602–22.

¹⁸ Bruno Niederbacher, 'The human soul: Augustine's case for soul–body dualism', in David Vincent Meconi and Eleonore Stump, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2014), 125–41.

soul. On this understanding, it was clear not only (as Augustine had recognized) that affections and spiritual states had physical consequences, but that bodily relationships and ethical growth were intimately and materially connected.

In the late-medieval model of friendship which emerged from this intellectual background, mutual charity both generated new relationships and, in the process, transformed their participants. The opening up of one individual to another in friendship rendered the person susceptible to being changed both in body and in spirit. This understanding of the transformative potential of friendship was predicated on the perception that the friend was different (and not, *pace* Aristotle, 'another self'): the act of friendship therefore yielded an altered perspective.¹⁹ In this pre-Cartesian, late-medieval culture in which mind and body were not understood to be distinct, a bond of friendship was perceived to be capable of effecting in each of those involved a transformation which was both spiritual and physical. The 'spirits' which were thought to emanate from all human beings were received by the senses of those whom they encountered. In the case of a loving friendship, as Augustine had earlier explained, the incorporation of the other's spirits would leave the 'image impressed on the sense'.²⁰ Remembering his own youthful friendship and citing Horace, Augustine wrote:

Someone has well said of his friend, 'He was half my soul'. I had felt my soul and his soul were one soul in two bodies.²¹

Later medieval writers would continue to describe the emotional relationship of loving friends as transformative of one another, albeit not always conducive to happiness and health. The heart was widely understood in this period to be porous, and susceptible of physical alteration by the emotional and intellectual repercussions of human relationships.²² Modern cognitive neuroscience has returned to a similar understanding, albeit differently described and interpreted, of an 'embodied mind'. In today's scientific parlance, mirror neurons in the brain resonate with external stimuli, forming themselves in response into new patterns.²³ This research demonstrates what late-medieval people already knew (but which for the past five centuries has been denied by 'rational' thought): that empathy leaves traces in the mind-and-body, fostering a physical and mental process of intersubjective exchange and transformation.

¹⁹ Marilyn Friedman, *What Are Friends For? Feminist Perspectives on Personal Relationships and Moral Theory* (Ithaca, NY, 1993), 187–206, esp. p. 199. On the complementary difference of others, see also the text of Hannah Arendt cited on p. 2 of the present study.

²⁰ Augustine, *The Trinity, Books 8–15*, transl. Stephen McKenna (Washington, DC, 2002), 64–5 (11.5).

²¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. Chadwick, 59.

²² Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago, 2000); Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart* (New Haven and London, 2010), esp. ch. 2, 'The porous heart'.

²³ Vittorio Gallese and Massimo Ammaniti, *The Birth of Intersubjectivity: Psychodynamics, Neurobiology, and the Self* (New York, 2014).

At the end of the thirteenth century in Italy, infinite changes on this idea were rung by the vernacular poets of the *dolce stil nuovo*. Guido Cavalcanti, for example, described not a metaphorical but a psychological and physical breakdown consequent upon the sight and presence of his beloved:

You've so filled my mind with pain
 my soul hurries to leave
 my heart moans to my eyes
 it can suffer no more.
 Love, feeling your worth,
 says—I'm sad you must die
 by this fiery woman, who flat
 refuses to hear of your mercy—
 I walk as dead
 appearing—to who will look—a man
 made of bronze or stone or wood
 crafted by her mastery
 with a wounded heart
 active mortality, an open sign.²⁴

More positive was the vein of thought which envisaged mutual love as bringing its participants into conformity with one another. In the fourteenth century the hermit and mystic Richard Rolle, discoursing on the love of God, noted that

Every lover is assimilated to his beloved: love makes the loving one like what he loves . . .²⁵

The late fifteenth-century Florentine *Fior di virtù* quoted both Augustine and St Bernard as saying

that love is nothing but a transmutation into the beloved object by means of imitation and conforming and living as far as possible with the virtues, wishes and habits of the beloved of one's choice.²⁶

In the perfected vision of human life in the world which is presented in the *Paradiso* of Dante, communication between the souls is complete, because by mutual love each, while preserving its individuality, is at the same time able to

²⁴ "Tu m'hai sì piena di dolor la mente, | che l'anima si briga di partire, | e li sospir' che manda 'l cor dolente | mostrano agli occhi che non può soffrire. | Amor, che lo tuo grande valor sente, | dice: "E' mi duol che ti convien morire | per questa fiera donna, che nient'e | par che piatate di te voglia udire." | I' vo come colui ch'è fuor di vita, | che pare, a chi lo sguarda, ch'omo sia | fatto di rame o di pietra o di legno, | che si conduca sol per maestria | e porti ne lo core una ferita | che sia, com'egli è morto, aperto segno." Guido Cavalcanti, *The Complete Poems*, transl. Marc Cirigliano (New York, 1992), 18–19.

²⁵ Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, transl. Clifton Wolters (Harmondsworth, 1972), 100.

²⁶ *The Florentine Fior di virtù of 1491*, transl. and ed. Nicholas Fersin and Lessing J. Rosenwald (Philadelphia, 1953), 13.

enter and fully to comprehend every other. The poet created neologisms to express this charitable economy of unlimited intersubjectivity. In the circle of Venus or love, the character of Dante addresses the spirit of the troubadour Folquet of Marseille, who later became a Cistercian monk and a bishop. Desiring the latter to speak, Dante says, a little impatiently: 'Surely I should not wait for your request, were I in you, even as you are in me' ('Già non attendere' io tua dimanda, | s'io m'intuassi, come tu t'inmii').²⁷ For, as Dante also pronounces, 'God sees all, and your vision he makes part of himself' ('Dio vede tutto, e tuo veder s'inluia').²⁸ To be able to 'be within' one another and to make the other a part of oneself were the ideals of this understanding of charity. It was a relation which, while it preserved the identity of the person, yet blurred its boundaries and allowed it, through possession of another, both to give and to receive enriching enlightenment and strength. The paradigm finds its complete realization at the final climax of the *Divine Comedy*, in the poet's extraordinary account of his direct vision of the divine principle informing all creation. The pilgrim feels himself embraced, absorbed, and ultimately transformed by the moment—experienced as an eternity—of unity and complete comprehension: 'one sole appearance, even as I changed, was altering itself to me' ('una sola parvenza, | mutandom'io, a me si travagliava').²⁹ And yet at the same time, throughout this transfiguring process of mutual absorption and exchange, the visionary retains his bodily subjectivity, through and in which the experience finds expression. The final lines of the poem square this circle, as the poet records how 'my desire and my will' find their true meaning as they are 'revolved, like a wheel that is evenly moved, by the love which moves the sun and the other stars':

già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle,
sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,
l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.³⁰

This spiritual, psychological, emotional, and corporeal understanding of the power of love and friendship underlay the ethical and bodily behaviour, comportment, and gestures which, as Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 describe, were cultivated in the guilds. The medieval European guilds shared a particular rhetoric and practice of companionship and fraternal love, which helped to distinguish the companies from the rest of contemporary society; but their effective employment of this language, to audiences both within and beyond the group, depended also upon its currency in a wider cultural environment. Their dual aspect, interior and exterior to the person, means that these modes of response could be ritualized in formal and public ways without losing their emotional content. Given the perceived unity of body and soul in

²⁷ *Paradiso*, ix.80–1.

²⁹ *Paradiso*, xxxiii.113–14.

²⁸ *Paradiso*, ix.73.

³⁰ *Paradiso*, xxxiii.143–5.

late-medieval culture, the separation which in the present day is sometimes claimed to exist between inwardly 'sincere' feelings and socially 'imposed' expressions of emotion is no more pertinent than is the alleged binary distinction between a 'true' self and a 'social' one. Our heavy dependence on normative texts, which describe the companionship and the love of fraternity members in the ceremonial language of formal and public gestures, does not mean that we should see these as merely 'outward observances', nor that we are cut off from the emotional experience of the participants. The centrality of these words and actions in the ordinances and accounts of all of the thousands of guilds of which we have records is a very strong indication that they were understood by their participants as active means both to construct secular social networks and to foster spiritual growth. They are good examples of what William Reddy has called 'emotives': emotions used as means to change reality.³¹ How, in precise detail, the effects of engaging with these emotional rituals were felt in the lives of particular guild members it is not possible for us to tell. But there is no reason to doubt the transformative potential of the fraternities, to which their participation gave active form. The rites of the brotherhoods entailed the subjection of the body to another's embrace: a corporeal opening which permitted the possibility of a modification of the self's complacency. New brothers or sisters of a guild of Corpus Christi at Grantham in the 1330s received a kiss from the alderman, 'as a sign of fraternal love and mutual charity'.³² Modern feeling tends to be suspicious of a gesture that is learned, holding it impossible that this could be sincere. The polite conventions of the modern public sphere, such as the shaking of hands on meeting, tend to be understood as means, not to bring the other much closer, but to maintain a convenient distance. Yet other cultures, including that of medieval Christianity in general and of the late-medieval guilds in particular, have taken a different view, encouraging the acquisition of habits of affection through the practice of loving gestures. These societies consciously adopted the religious principle of treating the other person as if he or she were a friend as the catalyst of a mode of living. The purposes which were understood to be served by this strategy were at once personal and social.

MAKING FRIENDS

The greatest minds of the Middle Ages devoted their attention to the true meaning and importance of friendship, and some awareness of their

³¹ William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001).

³² TNA: PRO C 47/40/109.

arguments permits a better understanding of the resonance of the term, and of its Latin equivalents, *caritas* and *amicitia*, when they are encountered in the vernacular context of the guilds. Historians have come to recognize the great significance of the idea of friendship within the environment of medieval monasticism, and also amongst certain groups of intellectuals of the period.³³ Yet the same seriousness has not been directed to understanding the rhetoric of friendship in the usually unlearned and often socially obscure worlds of the medieval fraternities. This is one more instance of that supposed distinction between two imagined 'tiers' of cultural history, a distinction which much recent historical writing has rightly called in question.³⁴ The importance of love in social relationships was a theme frequently discussed in a variety of contexts.

The fountainhead of Western ideas on friendship is Aristotle, whose observations, contained in Books VIII and IX of *Ethics*, influenced all subsequent writers on the subject, reaching medieval readers both indirectly via Cicero's writings and directly once the book was translated into Latin by the 1240s. Aristotle, crucially, distinguished three types of friendship: the pleasant, the useful, and the good.³⁵ The first, according to the philosopher, is characteristic of youth, and is as transient as it is spontaneous. The second is self-seeking, and 'when the cause of their being friends is removed, the friendship is dissolved too, on the assumption that the friendship aims at these [useful results]'.³⁶ The only perfect and lasting friendship is that between people who love one another not for some ulterior end but for what they are in themselves.

Those who wish goods to their friend for the friend's own sake are friends most of all; for they have this attitude because of the friend himself, not coincidentally.³⁷

Nor is this love for others incidental to the growth and fulfilment of the individual who loves. One cannot live a full life in isolation: others are necessary.

³³ Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France* (Oxford, 1979); Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350–1250* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1988); Julian P. Haseldine, ed., *Friendship in Medieval Europe* (Stroud, 1999); Haseldine, ed., *The Letters of Peter of Celle* (Oxford, 2001); J. McLoughlin, 'Amicitia in practice: John of Salisbury (c.1120–80) and his circle', in Daniel Williams, ed., *England in the Twelfth Century: Proceedings of the 1988 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge, 1990), 156–81. Klaus Oschema, 'Sacred or profane? Reflections on love and friendship in the Middle Ages', in Laura Gowing, Michael Hunter, and Miri Rubin, eds, *Love, Friendship and Faith in Europe, 1300–1800* (Basingstoke, 2005), 43–65, gives a *tour d'horizon* of the most prominent medieval writers on the subject, correctly arguing that, in the later Middle Ages, the elements identified in the binary distinction of his title were intermingled.

³⁴ e.g. Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2008).

³⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. and ed. Irwin, 121–3 (VIII.3).

³⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. and ed. Irwin, 121–2 (VIII.3).

³⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. and ed. Irwin, 122 (VIII.3).

If it is more proper to a friend to confer benefits than to receive them . . . the excellent person will need people for him to benefit.³⁸

In thus opening out to another person, Aristotle pronounced, each shows a virtuous love for his own self: for a good person, in becoming a friend, activates and manifests what is good in himself. So friendship is at once both a social virtue and a means to the realization of virtue in the individual person.³⁹

In due course these ideas were appropriated by Christian teachers, beginning of course with the words of Christ: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself', the founding injunction of the new religion, was at the same time a restatement of the Aristotelian principle.⁴⁰ St Augustine went so far as to identify virtue with rightly directed love, and when he defined what we would call a political community or state, and what he called 'a people', he did so in terms of love. Whereas Cicero had offered the definition that it was a body of people united by an equality of justice, Augustine rejected this as unrealizable in a sinful world. Instead, Augustine proposed his own definition:

Where there is a multitude of people, joined together in a common enjoyment of what they truly love, there may fitly be said to be a people.⁴¹

A 'true' love, in this context, could not be for some transient material advantage, desire for which might generate rivalry rather than harmony. An object of true love would be equally accessible to all. In the world, the highest common goal, for Augustine, was peace. Yet rightly directed love, in his account, could not settle even on this desirable earthly purpose, but was naturally drawn beyond the terrestrial level, to reciprocate that divine love from which humanity first proceeded. Despite the impossibly vast distance between the godhead and the mortal human being, the individual was impelled to repay that gift of creation through the action of love in the world. Augustine's account of how love identified its own distant point of origin and was drawn upwards to be reunited with it was couched in Platonic terms:

It transcended my mind, not in the way that oil floats on water, nor as heaven is above earth. It was superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it. The person who knows the truth knows it, and he who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it. Eternal truth and true love and beloved eternity: you are my God.⁴²

³⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. and ed. Irwin, 148 (IX.9).

³⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. and ed. Irwin, 125 (VIII.5).

⁴⁰ Matt. 19.19.

⁴¹ 'Populus est coetus multitudinis rationalis rerum quas diligit concordie communione sociatus.' Augustine, *The City of God*, XIX.24. See also M. A. McNamara, *Friendship in St Augustine* (Friburg, 1958); Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge, 1992).

⁴² Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.10, transl. and ed. Chadwick, 123.

In the background of this Augustinian discourse of spiritual charity, medieval sources also record, naturally enough, the continuing currency at that period of what Aristotle had called 'useful friendship'. Friendship of this nature, selfishly motivated and opportunistic, would later be the sole kind recognized by Thomas Hobbes:

By nature . . . we are not looking for friends but for honour or advantage [*commodum*] from them. This is what we are primarily after; friends are secondary.⁴³

The medieval forms of *amicitia* which have been discussed by Gerd Althoff all fall within this category. Defensive pacts between aristocrats and diplomatic bonds between political rivals can be shown to have been calculated and utilitarian.⁴⁴ Analysis of 'friendship alliances' based upon sworn oaths and guarantees sheds light on the territorial ambitions, the political aspirations, and the ecclesiastical patronage of the medieval aristocracy. Unaccountably, however, Althoff chooses to go further, and to assert that friendship of Aristotle's third kind, the friendship which does not calculate or require a reciprocal advantage, simply did not exist in the medieval period: 'In the Middle Ages friendship was not the expression of a subjective feeling or emotion, but rather a type of contract carrying with it an obligation of mutual help and support.'⁴⁵ The examples cited by Althoff of alliances described in contemporary sources by the term *amicitia* do exemplify the concept of friendship as a contractual bond, securing explicit and determined political ends.⁴⁶ But, as the remainder of this chapter will indicate, late-medieval lay men and women were also aware of, and on occasion experienced, a kind of friendship that was, by contrast, both rooted in emotion and generous in its expression, and to which they attributed not a material but a spiritual value.

Augustine's passage from human friendship to the longing for God, to arrive at the image of divinity itself as the embodiment of love, was followed by other influential thinkers, amongst whom one of the most notable was a twelfth-century Englishman, the Cistercian Aelred of Rievaulx. Aelred in effect identified charity, bearing the double connotation of love and friendship, with God. Like Augustine, Aelred saw charity as man's due recompense to God for the gifts of creation and Christ's intercessory sacrifice, and his definition reads like a general manifesto for the later medieval guilds:

⁴³ Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen* [*De cive*, 1642], transl. Michael Silverthorne and ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, 1998), 22.

⁴⁴ Gerd Althoff, *Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue. Zum politischen Stellenwert der Gruppenbindungen im frühen Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 1990), transl. Christopher Carroll as *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 2004).

⁴⁵ Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers*, 66.

⁴⁶ Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers*, 67–90.

This is what the love of God consists in: the love of our neighbour. It is also written: 'this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.' And how did the Lord love us? 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.' And how will you lay down your life for me, if you will not lend me a needle and thread when I need it? How will you shed blood for me, if you think it beneath you to give me a cup of cold water, if you cannot be bothered to take your hand out of your pocket for me? If you refuse to say a good word for me, when will you die for me? Let us, therefore, obey each other, love each other, for love is the fulfilling of the law.⁴⁷

In his dialogue on the subject composed in the 1160s, Aelred's conclusion was clear:

- IVO: What does all this add up to? Shall I say of friendship what John, the friend of Jesus, says of charity (*caritas*): 'God is friendship'?
- AELRED: That would be unusual, to be sure, nor does it have the sanction of the Scriptures. But still what is true of charity, I surely do not hesitate to grant to friendship, since: 'he that abides in friendship, abides in God, and God in him.'⁴⁸

A new phase of interest in the nature of friendship was triggered by the translation into Latin of the *Ethics*. Commenting on this section of Aristotle's work in the middle of the thirteenth century, Albertus Magnus glossed friendship as the principle by which divine goodness was transmitted between human beings, and thus made active in the world.⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas developed further the idea that divinity was diffused throughout creation through the medium of individuals communicating goodness between one another.⁵⁰ These views lent a new and momentous significance to the construction by individuals, at all levels of society, of relationships based upon true friendship or charity.

The Christian principle of universal love, or charity for all (the *agapē* of the first followers of Christ), might appear to be in tension with the chosen and particular relationships of friends (the *philia* of the classical texts on the subject). However, Aquinas did not see this as a contradiction, but rather understood the natural relations of virtuous friends to be perfected in the spiritual grace of charity or love of God. In giving this positive emphasis to friendship, Aquinas invoked Christ's words reported in the gospel of John: 'Henceforth I call you not servants . . . but I have called you friends.' St Thomas connected this scriptural model directly to a citation from Aristotle

⁴⁷ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermones inediti*, ed. C. H. Talbot (Rome, 1952), 171–2, cit. Aelred Squire, *Aelred of Rievaulx: A Study* (London, 1969), 58–9. Cf. Matt. 25.34–40.

⁴⁸ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, transl. M. E. Laker (Kalamazoo, MI, 1977), 65–6. The scriptural citation is 1 John 4.16, which in the King James translation reads: 'God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.' See Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050–1200* (London, 1972), 106–7.

⁴⁹ Matthew S. Kempshall, *The Common Good in Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, 1999), 49–50.

⁵⁰ Kempshall, *Common Good*, 81–2.

on friendship understood as the expression of goodwill for the sake of the other.⁵¹ At the same time a key difference of emphasis stands out in the Christian vision of charity, by contrast with its Aristotelian predecessor. Whereas the Aristotelian model of friendship was based on mutual equality, the Augustinian and Thomist accounts of charity were based on a premise of incalculable inequality: the understanding that love for another was part of man's feeble yet necessary attempt to return to God what was owing for the immeasurable gifts of creation and redemption.⁵²

The resonance of these ideas was not confined to the schoolroom. Augustine, Albertus, and Thomas were themselves keenly aware of strains in their contemporary societies upon which their views on charity had a bearing. This was even more explicitly true of such a figure as Remigio de' Girolami, the Dominican preacher and writer of the early fourteenth century who moved, after completing his studies in the university of Paris, to embark on a career of intense engagement with the problems of civil life in Florence and elsewhere. In his book *On the Common Good*, Remigio drew directly on Aristotle to denounce the merely utilitarian motives which largely guided the affections of contemporary townspeople. Like Aristotle, Remigio held that the rightly loving individual showed a proper love of him- or herself, since the act of loving the good in another person was the means to realize the good in oneself. Consequently, Remigio argued, the individual could achieve greater personal virtue in a community bound by love than in solitude. In fact, as a mere tiny part of humanity, the isolated individual could accomplish little of virtue; but together with his or her fellow human beings, he or she could contribute to the realization of the greater, common good. Because of its relative approximation to the divine principle of unity, Remigio held that the community to which one belonged should be loved even above one's self. Peace in the community was the highest goal of man in an imperfect world (in this Remigio followed Augustine rather than Aristotle); and the means to achieve that peace was love. Paradoxically, to give such priority to the community was, on this argument, the best means to benefit one's individual soul. The salvation of the individual thus depended upon the primary binding together of the community in loving friendship.⁵³

⁵¹ Jeanne Heffernan Schindler, 'A companionship of *caritas*: friendship in St. Thomas Aquinas', in von Heyking and Avramenko, eds, *Friendship and Politics*, 139–62. Cf. John 15.15.

⁵² Marko Fuchs, 'Philia and *caritas*: some aspects of Aquinas's reception of Aristotle's theory of friendship', in Tobias Hoffmann, Jörn Müller, and Mattias Perkams, eds, *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge, 2013), 203–19. Further on the idea of a communal debt, see Chapter 6 in the present study.

⁵³ Charles T. Davis, 'An early Florentine political theorist: Fra Remigio de' Girolami', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 104 (1960), 662–76; Kempshall, *Common Good*, 325–6 and chs 11, 12, *passim*.

THE CURRENCY OF FRIENDSHIP

These ideas, expressed in more-or-less similar terms, were current in late-medieval England. A fourteenth-century English homilist could often be heard emphasizing the fundamental importance of love in the life of the Christian. A sermon on 'The love of our neighbour' contained in a preacher's manual of that period invoked the awesome words of St Paul:

If I give my body to be burned, or distribute all my goods to feed the poor, but have no charity, it profits me nothing.

The same text distinguished true charity from utilitarian affection:

False friends lie when they say they love 'out of charity', for they love only as a dog loves bones just for the meat on them; when he has eaten the meat, he leaves the bones in the dirt and no longer cares for them.

And the preacher stressed the social dimension of virtuous friendship:

We should be flexible and embrace each other in mutual charity and support for each other in our needs, for by nature we are indeed too weak for each one to help himself without the help of his neighbour.⁵⁴

The motif of mutual dependence was developed further in another sermon in the same collection, which employed the metaphor of building a tabernacle to show how a Christian society—the actual phrase used, taken from Isaiah, is 'Jerusalem, a rich city'—cannot stand without the collaborative efforts of all its diverse members.⁵⁵ In the same vein Thomas Brinton, bishop of Rochester, preaching around 1378 on 'brotherly love', cited the Book of Proverbs: 'A brother who is helped by his brother is like a strong city.' Once again the emphasis was upon love as a social virtue, its importance in building a Christian society being underlined by examples of the socially destructive effects of misdirected affection.⁵⁶

Such pastoral texts for lay use as *The Lay-Folks' Mass Book* (first composed c.1400) insisted on the vital importance of being 'in charity' with one's neighbours before receiving the communion which simultaneously represented Christian unity and guaranteed the salvation of the individual

⁵⁴ *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook*, ed. S. Wenzel (University Park, PA, 1989), 186–7, 192–5; 1 Cor. 13.3. Cf. also *Fasciculus Morum*, 538–41, citing St Paul: 'Bear one another's burdens', and 614–15, citing *The Rule of St Augustine*.

⁵⁵ *Fasciculus Morum*, ed. Wenzel, 308–11.

⁵⁶ *The Sermons of Thomas Brinton, Bishop of Rochester (1373–1389)*, ed. M. A. Devlin, 2 vols, Camden Society, 3rd series, 86 (London, 1954), ii. 436–40. Prov. 18.19 is cited (p. 438) from the Vulgate text: modern translations based on the Hebrew rather than the Greek original give a somewhat different sense.

communicant.⁵⁷ Again, such a source of practical counsel on the spiritual life for the laity as Walter Hilton reminded his readers c.1380 that they had a moral obligation to love, from which even the merits of private devotion did not exonerate them:

For he who, for the love of God, through contemplation forsakes the love of his fellow Christians and does not behave towards them as he ought, when he is obliged to do so, does not fulfil charity.⁵⁸

The authors of many of these works were also conscious of drawing upon the classical argument—once again indebted ultimately to Aristotle—that the strongest foundation of the state was love: an idea developed in Cicero's widely read essay *On Friendship*, and epitomized in a play on words used in precisely this sense by fourteenth-century preachers: ROMA the mirror of AMOR.⁵⁹ The rhetoric of friendship both in and around the guilds was thus political no less than it was religious.

Nor was the expression of these ideas confined to clerics. A fishmonger and chamberlain of the City of London, who early in the fourteenth century copied into a collection of the *Customs of London* extracts from the learned Florentine Brunetto Latini's *Trésor*, associated Cicero by name with the idea that the surest defence of one's own interest was friendship. Amongst the phrases copied by Andrew Horn from Brunetto was the dictum that the state is supported upon three pillars: justice, reverence, and love. Justice, wrote the political philosopher, should be in rulers; reverence in subjects. But all should be united in love.⁶⁰ However idealistic or, at times, hypocritical in its expression (hypocrisy always being a tribute to the strength of an idea), this was a principle which was held up for admiration in other English towns, as by the ruling body of Coventry which in 1494 identified, as the aim of city government, 'unity, concord, and amity'.⁶¹ It was also regularly embodied in civic ceremonial, such as the Corpus Christi processions which, even as they celebrated the central and unifying Christian mystery of the mass, were at the same time explicitly constructed by the townspeople who participated as an image of harmony in the social 'body'. At Newcastle-upon-Tyne the feast of Corpus Christi was perceived, at least by its organizers, as an image of 'good unity, concord, and charity' binding the diverse trades of the town, whose

⁵⁷ *The Lay-Folks' Mass Book*, ed. T. F. Simmons, Early English Text Society, original series, 71 (1879), 48–9, 52–3.

⁵⁸ Walter Hilton, *Epistle on the Mixed Life*, in Robert N. Swanson, ed., *Catholic England: Faith, Religion and Observance before the Reformation* (Manchester, 1993), 104.

⁵⁹ Cicero, *De Amicitia*, c. 14, ed. Falconer, 160–3; *Fasciculus Morum*, ed. Wenzel, 612–13.

⁶⁰ *Liber Custumarum*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, Rolls Series (London, 1860), 16–25. On Horn, see Jeremy Catto, 'Andrew Horn: law and history in fourteenth-century England', in J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, ed., *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1981), 367–91.

⁶¹ *The Coventry Leet Book*, ed. Mary Dormer Harris, 4 vols, Early English Text Society, original series, 134, 135, 138, 146 (London, 1907–13), 555.

members went together in the procession ‘amicably and lovingly’.⁶² In London on the eve of the Reformation, Susan Brigden found an impressive quantity of contemporary references to the perceived importance of maintaining charity amongst neighbours.⁶³ As is also extensively demonstrated by recent local and regional studies of English and Continental guilds, talk of fraternal charity reached a particular intensity in urban contexts.⁶⁴ Once again it must be underlined that all of this evidence is equally indicative of the perceived fractures and tensions within contemporary society. But it is precisely against the background of persistent discord that the ideals and the nature of friendship cultivated in the guilds both demand and deserve the historian’s full attention.

BROTHERLY LOVE

The first point to note about the bonds of fraternity membership is that these were understood to be consciously willed into being by those who, exercising a degree of choice, took a decision to join with one another in a guild. In a minority of cases, especially in guilds associated with certain groups of craft workers, the freedom of choice was relatively limited. In a more inclusive sense, as has already been observed, it would be naïve to consider the guild member to be a wholly autonomous willing agent: the options available, and the language to describe them, were prescribed by the larger culture and political hierarchy. But the overriding principle of the guilds insisted that membership was entered into voluntarily, and it is reasonable to infer that this was the subjective experience of the vast majority of those who swore their oaths, paid their subscriptions, and bequeathed donations at their deaths. While the language of mutual support in all guild ordinances implied the member’s need to participate in the community, at the same time that participation required a freely willed decision on the part of the individual. This moral principle, that the basis for true fraternity was a freely given commitment, was occasionally expressed in a provision which explicitly allowed members to leave if they wished, a concession which was *de facto* permitted

⁶² Mervyn James, ‘Ritual, drama and social body in the late medieval English town’, *Past and Present*, 98 (1983), 3–29, at p. 10 (ordinance of 1536). On the organization of such ceremonies in London (where, however, Corpus Christi seems to have had less prominence than in other English cities), see Michael Berlin, ‘Civic ceremony in early modern London’, *Urban History Yearbook* (1986), 15–27.

⁶³ Susan Brigden, ‘Religion and social obligation in early sixteenth-century London’, *Past and Present*, 103 (1984), 67–112.

⁶⁴ See works cited in Chapter 1, n. 6.

in all cases. Thus of the thirty-eight members of a Sussex fraternity at the time of the 1388–9 royal inquiry, it was said that none was compelled to remain and that any might leave if they wished.⁶⁵ To this was added, in the late fifteenth-century statutes of the Germans' guild of the Holy Blood of Wilsnak in the church of the Austin Friars in London, the stipulation that anyone departing should do so on good terms with the other members.⁶⁶

The second, and complementary, principle concerning guild membership was that it should not be entered into primarily for motives of selfish material interest. That all guilds offered secular advantages of one sort or another is evident from their statutes, and modern study of the guilds has tended to focus upon these aspects as a means to understand the motivation of those who joined. Yet in view of the currency in pastoral teaching of the Aristotelian and Christian principle that virtuous friendship is selfless, more serious attention deserves to be given to the repeated statements in just these terms which can be read in the ordinances of the guilds. Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and other medieval commentators observed that true friendship would always find itself rewarded in this world as well as in the next.⁶⁷ It is in this perspective that we should regard the various material benefits which redounded to guild members, depending upon the scale and influence of their association: material support in times of hardship, social connections which could be of use in trade, a trustworthy position in society. Together with the spiritual benefits of guild masses for living and dead members, these worldly considerations were undoubtedly among the motives which attracted men and women to join fraternities.⁶⁸ Statutes warning against abuse draw attention to the reality of material motivations. The ordinances of the York Paternoster guild declared:

It is forbidden that any brother of the guild shall, in the belief that he will have help from his brethren, be forward in getting into a lawsuit or quarrel, or in upholding any wrongful cause whatever, upon pain of losing all help and friendship, or any relief, from the guild.⁶⁹

The primary declared aim in every case, however, was to foster a selfless commitment to God through the friendship of the community. This universal concern is epitomized in the opening words of the statement submitted in 1388–9 by the York guild of St John the Baptist: 'The first charge of this guild is, to cherish brotherly love.'⁷⁰ Similar was the report of the fraternity of St

⁶⁵ TNA: PRO C 47/46/435: the guild was based in Golyton.

⁶⁶ *Ordinances of Some Secular Guilds of London*, ed. H. C. Coote (London, 1871), 67.

⁶⁷ Kempshall, *Common Good*, *passim*.

⁶⁸ See further Chapters 4 and 6.

⁶⁹ TNA: PRO C 47/46/454; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 138.

⁷⁰ TNA: PRO C 47/46/455; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 146.

Anne in the church of St Lawrence Jewry in London, that it had been inaugurated in 1342

in maintenance of good love and for to nourish good and true company in destruction and amendment of men of wicked fame and evil bearing by way of alms and of charity.⁷¹

In a fourteenth-century fraternity of St Catherine in the Cambridge church of St Andrew,

each brother and sister of the guild should love one another with all the zeal of which they are capable.⁷²

Some guilds were more specific as to the means by which they hoped to realize these communitarian ends, notably by the resolution of disputes, if members could not achieve this by themselves. So in the Hull guild of the Virgin Mary, said to have been founded in 1357,

if any of the brothers or sisters quarrels with any other (which God forbid), it is ordained that, in as much as the guild was founded to cherish kindness and love, the aldermen, stewards and two help-men shall deal with the matter.⁷³

And at King's Lynn, the brothers and sisters of the guild of St Francis decreed by their statutes of 1454

that everybody shall keep peace, love, and charity with [each] other in as much as he can or may; harm nor heaviness wilfully he shall not do, but with weighty words, strength and might, as well without the town as within, he shall succour and keep him in his need.⁷⁴

In the Leicester guild of the Holy Trinity, it was declared in 1511, in a scriptural phrase cited also by Aelred of Rievaulx in a passage quoted above, that each of the brothers and sisters was to be charitable and loving to all:

since God is charity, and he who remains in charity, remains in God.⁷⁵

As was underlined in the previous chapter, many guilds held regular meetings to discipline members guilty of uncharitable behaviour towards one another.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS London Rolls 2; printed in Caroline M. Barron and Laura Wright, 'The London Middle English guild certificates of 1388–9', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 39 (1995), 108–45, at p. 121.

⁷² TNA: PRO C 47/38/6; printed in *Cambridge Gild Records*, ed. Mary Bateson (Cambridge, 1903), 79. Similarly in the contemporary record of the Cambridge guild of the Purification of the Virgin Mary, in Great St Mary's church, the members 'invicem exhibeant se pacificos et modestos, fraterna dilectione se mutuo pertractantes'. *Cambridge Gild Records*, ed. Bateson, 103.

⁷³ *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 158–9.

⁷⁴ Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, MS King's Lynn Gd.80.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Wilshere, *The Religious Gilds of Medieval Leicester* (Leicester, 1979), 24–5; cf. 1 John 4.16, and p. 101 in the present study.

⁷⁶ See pp. 69–71 in the present study.

Characteristically, the Holy Cross guild of London punished persistent quarrelling with expulsion.⁷⁷ In this harmonious and communitarian rhetoric of the guilds, there is a clear echo, and probably in many cases a conscious one, of the powerful image in the Acts of the Apostles:

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one mind and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common.⁷⁸

ACTIVE LOVE

The friendship of the guild was nothing if it was not active. As both Aristotle and Aquinas emphasized, the realization of the emotion or, as Aquinas termed it, the 'passion' of love was necessarily a performative process: love existed only in so far as it was communicated between friends.⁷⁹ On this argument, sympathy and empathy are not enough. One may have the imaginative capacity to feel and to acknowledge another's suffering, and yet not be moved an inch towards a sense of solidarity. Solidarity, indeed, calls for action. There is, perhaps, a modern tendency to regard the gestures of mutual solidarity which characterized the medieval fraternities as conventional and somewhat quaint. Yet we should recognize the ritualized behaviour of the guilds for what it was: the regular renewal of a personal commitment to a more-or-less extensive, more-or-less diverse community of friends. In the light of the moral economy of love handed down by St Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and the others, this was not an engagement to make light of. Like the passing of a loving cup, the exchange amongst all the members of a kiss of peace was no mere symbol of friendship: it was a performance of friendship in action.⁸⁰ In the words of the guild of St Catherine in the church of St Botolph Aldersgate, in London:

The first point is this, that when a brother or a sister shall be received, that they shall be sworn upon a book to the brotherhood, for to hold up and maintain the points and the articles that be written after following, each man to his power, saving his estate; and that every brother and sister, in tokening of love, charity, and peace, at receiving shall kiss every other of those that be there.⁸¹

⁷⁷ TNA: PRO C 47/41/190.

⁷⁸ Acts 4.32.

⁷⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. and ed. Irwin, Books VIII, IX; R. Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁸⁰ See further Chapter 4.

⁸¹ TNA: PRO C 47/41/198; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 6.

We are not obliged to envisage guild meetings as unremittingly harmonious love-feasts, and we should be naïve were we to do so. But the physical enactment of harmony was clearly taken seriously in this context, as it was also in other situations where reconciliation was called for. The kiss of peace was understood in medieval culture as much more than a superficial gesture: the public act was perceived to effect a permanent change in relationships.⁸² A preacher around 1400 concluded a story about two quarrelling knights, who ultimately buried their difference and embraced in front of a crucifix, with the injunction to his congregation:

Thus shall ye forgive [each] other for Christ's love, and clip [embrace], and kiss, and be friends; and then will Christ clip and kiss you, and give you the joy that ever shall last.⁸³

In this story the image itself played a role, giving a sign of its approval of the restoration of peace, and by implication standing (as is documented in other examples of image miracles) as a witness and guarantor of the oath of peace, with the threat of divine penalties on default.⁸⁴ By such means the fraternities could draw down divine sanction to reinforce the process of reconciliation. What is evident in all of the guilds for which evidence survives is a concern to foster among the members a friendship that was both active and, in the Augustinian sense, truly loving.

BEYOND KINSHIP

Because of their use of the terminology of brotherhood and sisterhood, the fraternities have been seen as surrogates for the blood-ties of the family. For the many dislocated people who sought stability and a respected identity in the highly mobile society of late-medieval England, this analogy with the family was surely an attraction of guild membership. High proportions of the increasing numbers of migrants to the towns in quest of work in the decades following the first arrival of the Black Death in 1348 were young, single, women and men.⁸⁵ Their experience was part of a wider shift, during the

⁸² In general see Kiril Petkov, *The Kiss of Peace: Ritual, Self, and Society in the High and Late Medieval West* (Leiden, 2003).

⁸³ *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*, ed. Theodor Erbe, Early English Text Society, extra series, 96 (1905), part i, p. 124.

⁸⁴ Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present* (London, 2013), 226, 234.

⁸⁵ Mobile workers joining brotherhoods have been documented also in German-speaking territories in the later Middle Ages. Katharina Simon-Muscheid, 'Spätmittelalterliche Bruderschaften und Königreiche. Stadtübergreifende und überregionale Netzwerke mobiler Gruppen im eidgenössisch-elsässisch-badischen Raum', in Escher-Apsner, ed., *Mittelalterliche Bruderschaften*,

long fourteenth century, from a prevailing pattern of extended stem families living together, which was increasingly replaced by smaller, more tightly knit yet by the same token less broadly supportive nuclear families.⁸⁶ Family ties would continue to be important sources of support throughout the later Middle Ages and beyond.⁸⁷ But the demographic fluctuations of this period put kin networks under great strain. Arriving in unfamiliar places where family support or familiar neighbours were lacking or distant, the mobile individuals who were so numerous in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were prominent amongst the recruits to the guilds, with their promise of friendship.⁸⁸ Lists of fraternity members reveal high proportions of the young and the unmarried. The register of the guild of the Holy Trinity at Luton in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries recorded, each year, distinct lists of new recruits who were either 'single' or 'married'.⁸⁹ The register of the London guild of the Holy Trinity and Saints Fabian and Sebastian in the parish of St Botolph Aldersgate reveals a striking prominence of single men amongst the independent women and married couples admitted.⁹⁰ In the Florentine confraternity of San Paolo in the late fifteenth century, half of the membership of about two hundred men comprised single youths.⁹¹ In the Holy Cross guild of Stratford-upon-Avon the fifteenth-century register shows 13 per cent of those enrolled to have been young single women or widows.⁹² The

255–91, esp. pp. 260–2; Ernst Schubert, *Fahrendes Volk im Mittelalter* (Bielefeld, 1995). Elsewhere in Europe, disruption caused by war was a further contributory influence upon the desire to found and to join fraternities. Catherine Vincent, *Des charités bien ordonnées. Les confréries normandes de la fin du XIIIe siècle au début du XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1988), esp. p. 74.

⁸⁶ On the English evidence for this transformation, see Zvi Razi, 'The myth of the immutable English family', *Past and Present*, 140 (1993), 27–42; Jeremy Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History 1250–1550* (London, 2004), ch. 2; Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), 46–51 (Dyer, adding nuance to the picture, notes that the extended family did not cease to matter to the transmission of landholdings in particular cases). On the impact of the reduction of family size on the quality of life, see Peter Laslett, 'Family, kinship and collectivity as systems of support in pre-industrial Europe: a consideration of the "nuclear hardship" hypothesis', *Continuity and Change*, 3 (1988), 153–75.

⁸⁷ Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, 'Gifts and favors: informal support in early modern England', *Journal of Modern History*, 72 (2000), 295–338.

⁸⁸ For the many young women who migrated to English towns in the later Middle Ages, see Jeremy Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c.1300–1520* (Oxford, 1992).

⁸⁹ Luton Museum and Art Gallery, Bedfordshire, Register of the Holy Trinity guild; see the printed edition, *The Register of the Fraternity or Guild of the Holy and Undivided Trinity and Blessed Virgin Mary in the Parish Church of Luton*, ed. Henry Gough (London, 1906).

⁹⁰ *Parish Fraternity Register. Fraternity of the Holy Trinity and SS. Fabian and Sebastian in the Parish Church of St. Botolph without Aldersgate*, ed. Patricia Basing, London Record Society, 18 (1982).

⁹¹ Ronald Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1982), ch. 3.

⁹² *The Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross, St Mary and St John the Baptist, Stratford-upon-Avon*, ed. Mairi Macdonald (Stratford-upon-Avon, 2007) (1406–1535).

proportion of unmarried women, together with another group of independent widows, in the documented guilds of late-medieval Normandy ranged from a fifth to almost a half of the membership.⁹³ To the large number of unmarried people, among whom women were particularly numerous, who grew up in or who migrated to towns in the later Middle Ages, the fraternity offered an irreproachable context within which to socialize and to build new relationships.

The familial language of the guilds was a part of their promise of mutual support and protection, in a world which for many recruits was otherwise lacking in these assurances. However, we ought also to underline the differences which distinguished the fraternity from the family. For the friendship group was, as we have seen, marked out by its voluntary and egalitarian basis.⁹⁴ The members of a guild committed themselves to begin a new life 'as if' they were bound by ties of blood.⁹⁵ Although every guild had its officers, and a minority developed political roles which caused leadership to be concentrated in an inner council, in the overwhelming majority of instances the power structure of the fraternities was flat. Official roles in principle rotated. Brothers and sisters were all equal in the sight of the company. The reciprocal relationship between these 'siblings' of the guild, while it was bound by a kiss and an oath of loyalty to the society, rested upon moral obligations, not juridical ones. If the basis had been juridical, the relationship would have ceased to be one of friendship.⁹⁶

The prominence of women which is notable in the English medieval guilds was also encountered elsewhere in Europe, although with variant emphasis. Almost all of the English fraternities (except for a small minority of those associated with particular crafts) admitted women. In Italy, where—unlike in the north of Europe or in Spain before the sixteenth century—penitential guilds comprising exclusively male flagellants were formed from the thirteenth century, there were also many confraternities to which women belonged.⁹⁷ Guilds comprising women alone are not clearly documented in England, although groups of women parishioners at times acted in the manner of guilds. At Swaffham in Norfolk at the beginning of the sixteenth century, 'the sisters of St Peter's guild', as a distinct body, contributed funds towards the building

⁹³ Vincent, *Des charités bien ordonnées*, 208–9.

⁹⁴ On this distinction, see Lillian Rubin, 'On kinship and friendship', ch. 2 of her *Just Friends* (New York, 1985).

⁹⁵ See p. 59 in the present study.

⁹⁶ On the distinction, see also Julian Pitt-Rivers, 'The kith and the kin', in Jack Goody, ed., *The Character of Kinship* (Cambridge, 1973), 89–105.

⁹⁷ Giovanna Casagrande, 'Confraternities and lay female religiosity in late medieval and Renaissance Umbria', in Nicholas Terpstra, ed., *The Politics of Ritual Kinship: Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, 2000), 48–66, gives a valuable review.

of a new steeple.⁹⁸ The women of Swaffham at this time also kept a 'stock' of money which was lent out to both men and women of the parish.⁹⁹ For women in particular, the space of the guild which was public and yet decorous offered an invaluable opportunity to undertake respected roles, whether in the ceremonies of the fraternity, or in watching over the body of a deceased brother or sister, or in sewing liveries and preparing dishes for the feast.¹⁰⁰ The guild was, in addition, a context in which, without scandal, partners might be sought and found. By an arrangement which acknowledged this expectation, unmarried young women joining the Holy Cross guild of Stratford-upon-Avon paid reduced entry fines, with the balance to pay on their marriage.¹⁰¹ And in a more inclusive sense, this was a context for the formation of legitimate friendships.

If women in general were held to be particularly vulnerable to the moral dangers of society, putting a premium on the advantage of fraternity membership, the same was also true of youth. The 'young scholars' of Bishop's Lynn were brought together from 1383 in a guild of the child saint William. The cult of little Saint William, who had supposedly been martyred by Jews at Norwich in the twelfth century, offered to the youth of late-medieval Lynn a model of innocence and salvation which was focused upon an image of the saint, maintained by the guild in a tabernacle in the church of St Margaret. The company lit six tapers before this image on feast days. Others, moved by the devotion of these young people, made gifts in its support. At the time of the survey of guilds in 1388–9, this youth fraternity had spent its resources on various good works and was looking for further patronage:

Wherefore, as children in young age, hoping in time coming to have been increased by help and counsel of wise men, our goods have dissented as we have aforesaid, no chattels keeping, as children which [hope] to be amended.¹⁰²

The late-medieval understanding of 'youth' extended from the mid-teens to the late twenties, during which period males, in particular, remained in the more moral danger because they tended to continue for this period unmarried. The 'young merchants' of King's Lynn took the patronage of the Nativity of St John the Baptist for their guild, begun in the same parish church of St

⁹⁸ Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, MS PD 52/71, Swaffham churchwardens' accounts, 16th century, fol. 34^v (1509). See also Katherine L. French, 'Maidens' lights and wives' stores: women's parish guilds in late medieval England', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 29 (1998), 399–425.

⁹⁹ Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, MS PD 52/233, Records of the guild of St John the Baptist, Swaffham, 15th–16th centuries, *sub annis* 1500, 1517 ('the women's stock' or 'the women's store': in 1500 the store, totalling about £2, was distributed between ten named individuals).

¹⁰⁰ e.g. Westminster Abbey Muniment Room, Accounts of the guild of the Assumption of St Mary, Westminster, late 15th–early 16th centuries, *passim*.

¹⁰¹ *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross . . . Stratford-upon-Avon*, 32. The terminology used to refer to single women in guild texts is reviewed by Cordelia Beatty, *Medieval Single Women: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2007), 96–123.

¹⁰² TNA: PRO C 47/43/274.

Margaret in 1362. After a while, 'many other young merchants of other towns' were drawn into this body, which was able, unlike St William's fraternity, to report to the surveyors of 1388–9 that it held a healthy financial reserve of eighteen pounds.¹⁰³ To fill the minds of the young with virtuous thoughts, and to guide their choices of friends, were equally the concerns of youth confraternities documented elsewhere in Europe and especially in Italy.¹⁰⁴ In the later fifteenth century, in an atmosphere of moral reform which would further intensify in the period of the Council of Trent, a number of guilds were founded for the moral improvement of the young. The aim was not merely corrective and disciplinary: the young were singled out for their perceived innocence, as a model for the rest of society. Their costumes in confraternity processions likened the members to angels, come to earth to draw the rest of humanity back to the path of salvation.

FRIENDSHIP NETWORKS

The flexibility of the network of friends meant that, depending upon its human and material resources, it could be extended in diverse directions to further the ethical purposes of the organization. The scale of the medieval guilds ranged from some very small groups to societies numbering several hundred, but the vast majority comprised a few score members.¹⁰⁵ Some urban fraternities were concentrated within their respective parishes.¹⁰⁶ A guild at Yarborough in Lincolnshire defined its membership as 'neighbours',¹⁰⁷ and another in rural Cambridgeshire limited itself to the Apostolic number of twelve.¹⁰⁸ These examples are typical of the smaller societies, while

¹⁰³ TNA: PRO C47/43/255.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York and London, 1980), 381–5; Nicholas Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna* (Cambridge, 1995), 21–3; Konrad Eisenbichler, *The Boys of the Archangel Raphael: A Youth Confraternity in Florence, 1411–1785* (Toronto, 1998).

¹⁰⁵ One or two guilds, by advertising substantial indulgences, recruited across a wide territory a different kind of subscriber: one whose association with the fraternity was relatively distant and impersonal. The Ludlow palmer's guild and the Boston guild of Our Lady were the two outstanding instances of this untypical practice. Shrewsbury, Shropshire Archives, MS LB 5/3/3–12; *The Victoria History of the County of Shropshire*, ii (London, 1973), 138; British Library, MS Egerton 2886; R. N. Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge, 2007), 122, 134–6, 375–6.

¹⁰⁶ Caroline Barron, 'The parish fraternities of medieval London', in Caroline M. Barron and Christopher Harper-Bill, eds, *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society* (Woodbridge, 1985), 13–37.

¹⁰⁷ TNA: PRO C 47/41/185: the guild of Corpus Christi.

¹⁰⁸ TNA: PRO C 47/38/36: Tydd St Giles guild of the Virgin's Assumption. Fixed numbers of sixty and thirteen are also recorded: respectively the guild of St Nicholas at Bury St Edmunds,

that of the Virgin Mary's Assumption in Westminster, which counted some two hundred active members around 1500, was an instance of the rarer class of larger association.¹⁰⁹ The numbers in most fraternities probably fell in the range between fifty and a hundred members. The question of numbers had been addressed, in relation to friendship, by Aristotle, who opined that 'it is impossible to be many people's friend for their virtue and for themselves'.¹¹⁰ Aristotle justified this reservation by the emotional commitment, which he felt could not extend beyond a strictly limited number of true friends. As with any proposed constraint on human relationships, there was an unexpressed political dimension to this pronouncement. Aristotle did not envisage his personal friendship group extending beyond definite social limits. It has been seen that the medieval guilds were occasionally reproved for seeming to suggest that any limit at all should be placed on Christian brotherhood. The twofold response of the fraternities to this charge was pragmatic—one could not befriend the whole world, and must begin with those to whom one was exposed by fortune—and disciplinary—the concentrated nature of the group enabled ethical values to be practised and monitored in a way which was both focused and constructive.¹¹¹ Within these parameters, the guild was capable of articulating complex and variable connections between its members.

The intercourse between a busy market town and its surrounding region was very commonly manifested in the meetings of an urban-based fraternity. The Holy Cross guild of Stratford-upon-Avon, much of whose membership was drawn from the town and its immediate hinterland, comprised in addition still more numerous adherents from a wide scatter of market villages. Prominent among these were local centres of the butchering, leather, and textile trades which were important in Stratford's own economy: Chipping Camden and Shipston-on-Stour to the south, Bromsgrove, Redditch, King's Norton, and Feckenham to the north.¹¹² Guild membership gave these outsiders a personal connection, identity, and role within Stratford when they came there to trade. Not only individuals but entire families would enrol themselves, as did John Stafford, his wife Maud, and their son, William, in 1421–2.¹¹³ Pebworth and Broad Marston, adjacent villages situated five miles south-west of Stratford, contributed thirteen new members in a single year, 1470–1. This particular group included the vicar of Pebworth, whose recruitment may have influenced some of his parishioners.¹¹⁴ A single individual could participate

Suffolk, founded in 1282, and the guild of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary at Baston, Lincolnshire. TNA: PRO C 47/46/415, C 47/39/77.

¹⁰⁹ Gervase Rosser, *Medieval Westminster 1200–1540* (Oxford, 1989), 286.

¹¹⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. and ed. Irwin, 151 (IX.10).

¹¹¹ See pp. 52–5 in the present study.

¹¹² *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross, Stratford-upon-Avon*, 24 and *passim*.

¹¹³ *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross, Stratford-upon-Avon*, 78.

¹¹⁴ *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross, Stratford-upon-Avon*, 284–91.

concurrently in diverse orders of fellowship: a later vicar of Pebworth left bequests in 1510 both to the Holy Cross guild in Stratford and to a guild of St Mary at the village of Aston Cantlow, north-west of Stratford.¹¹⁵ Such short-range contacts (over five, ten, or fifteen miles) were the most characteristic of the fraternity; but the town's wider connections are evinced by the Droitwich salters who compounded for their admission fee with the commodity in which they trafficked, and the Bristol merchant who paid in wine.¹¹⁶ The ties which brought guild members together in brotherhood and sisterhood could be relatively far-flung. A guild based at King's Lynn, dedicated to St Edmund, was probably born of trading connections with the town of Bury St Edmunds.¹¹⁷

The Lichfield guild of St Mary and St John the Baptist, founded as the combination of two pre-existing fraternities in 1387, provides a further example of the scope of these networks of friends. The incentive to seek the royal licence which established this new foundation in the small cathedral town will have lain partly in a desire to fend off mounting criticisms of the guilds at this time.¹¹⁸ Of the seven named petitioners for the royal patronage, four held public office in the county of Staffordshire, a fact which reflects both the guild's need to channel its appeal to the crown through such powerful intermediaries and its ability to secure their advocacy.¹¹⁹ Throughout the period between the late fourteenth century and the suppression of all fraternities in 1547, a strength of the Lichfield guild lay in its sheer size: this was a larger company than the average, with a prominent civic role and a regional presence. No fixed fee was charged for admission: new recruits, rich or poor, were expected to contribute according to their resources. Entrants' offerings ranged from a few pence to five pounds; in the early sixteenth century the typical sum was between 20*d.* and 3*s.* 8*d.*¹²⁰ Gifts in kind were acceptable, so c.1410 John Parchmentmaker was admitted in return for his donation of sufficient parchment to make a missal.¹²¹ After this initial outlay, no further regular subscription seems, in this relatively unusual case, to have been levied on members. The membership included, as was normal, both men and women, representing a very wide range of occupations,¹²² and was concentrated on

¹¹⁵ Worcester, Worcestershire Archives Office, MS 008/7/BA 3585/1a.

¹¹⁶ *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross, Stratford-upon-Avon*, 140, 145, 212.

¹¹⁷ *The Making of King's Lynn: A Documentary Survey*, ed. Dorothy Owen, *Records of Social and Economic History*, new series, 9 (1984), 60–3.

¹¹⁸ See pp. 52–5, 64–5 in the present study.

¹¹⁹ For the details see A. G. Rosser, 'The town and guild of Lichfield in the late Middle Ages', *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 27 (1987 for 1985–6), 39–47, at p. 40 n. 9.

¹²⁰ Lichfield Joint Record Office, MS D. 77/1, Register of the guild of St Mary and St John, Lichfield (Lichfield Register).

¹²¹ Lichfield Register, 51.

¹²² Occupations are not noted sufficiently often in the register to admit of thorough analysis, but include e.g. butcher, barber, weaver, dyer, draper, sawyer, smith, saddler, ironmonger,

Lichfield and its immediate hinterland, although a proportion was drawn from further afield. In the period 1387–1450, 15.5 per cent of a total of 2,253 admissions were recruited from places more than ten miles from Lichfield.¹²³ A small yet regular element of politically prominent recruits helped to consolidate the prestige and influence of the guild within the town and its region.¹²⁴ The annual recruitment in the late fourteenth century was fifty to sixty people; in the early fifteenth, thirty to thirty-five; later in the fifteenth and early in the sixteenth century the yearly tally was around one hundred.¹²⁵ This healthy figure was maintained in the 1520s; in the early 1540s it still stood as high as fifty; but in 1546–7, with closure imminent, just eleven were enrolled: these were the last before the parliamentary suppression of all guilds in the latter year.¹²⁶ The membership of the guild must have numbered, at any time in the late Middle Ages, upwards of two hundred women and men. Lichfield's population between the late fourteenth and the early sixteenth centuries was in the range of 1,500 to 2,500.¹²⁷ It is evident that the guild comprised a major element of both the urban community and the villages in its hinterland. By these means in Lichfield, Stratford, and countless other instances, the barriers of unfamiliarity and mistrust which arose amongst a fluid population could be broken down, and a basis both for commerce and for deeper relationships of friendship might be established.

CONCLUSION

Central to the concept of friendship in the guilds was a partial suppression of the self in the name of a mutual obligation, the value of which was understood to transcend the interests of the individual member. This mutuality was made active in the gestures of peace and love at meeting and in periodic acts of charity, the epitome of which was the provision, in a guild at Lincoln founded in 1354, that when a member was out of work, the other brothers and sisters

painter, goldsmith, servant, chapman, fiddler: respectively Lichfield Register, 62, 124, 107, 190, 178, 152, 104, 62, 78, 58, 88, 85, 214, 210. The professions are represented by a doctor and a schoolmaster: Lichfield Register, 85. Single women entering include (in 1486) 'Plesance la Famme' who, if she was indeed the prostitute, or former prostitute, that her name implies, stretches the catchment wider than might be expected: Lichfield Register, 198.

¹²³ The ratio of new members living more than ten miles from the town peaked (at 27 per cent) in the late 1390s. The places of residence of members admitted appear to be recorded in the register consistently until c.1450, but not thereafter.

¹²⁴ See further Chapter 6.

¹²⁵ Lichfield Register, *passim*.

¹²⁶ Lichfield Register, 385–6.

¹²⁷ 1,024 inhabitants paid the poll tax of 1377; 391 contributed to the subsidy of 1524: A. C. Pinnock, 'Staffordshire medieval population and prosperity: a study of available sources', *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies*, 14 (1974), 34–45, at pp. 44 (n. 29) and 45 (n. 42).

would take turns to offer him or her a meal each day in their homes.¹²⁸ In such instances the other's need provided the individual with an opportunity to lay aside selfish priorities and to engage his or her potential for growth as a member of an ethical community. From one point of view the guild offered material support for members in need. By the same token, and with profounder significance, it fostered the expression of an active charity. Cicero had anticipated this vision of friendship which was elaborated in the medieval guilds:

I am inclined to think that friends ought at times to be in want of something. For instance, what scope would my affections have had if Scipio had never wanted my advice or co-operation at home or abroad?¹²⁹

For a member of a fraternity, fellowship with the sisters and brothers represented an opportunity for personal reorientation. By turning outwards from selfish preoccupations, and by compromising self-interest, the individual was given the potential to grow as a participant in a spiritual community.

¹²⁸ TNA: PRO C 47/40/136.

¹²⁹ Cicero, *De amicitia*, ed. Falconer, c. 14, pp. 162–3.



Fig. 4 A feast of the Ludlow palmers' guild. Fifteenth-century window in the guild chapel, parish church of St Lawrence, Ludlow. Photo: Christian Liddy.

Sacrament

The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life to the world.

John 6.33

BY INVITATION

At the annual feast, more than at any other time of the year, the members of a guild would gather in one place to assert their solidarity. Feasting and drinking were, indeed, regarded as defining activities of the guilds. According to a phrase found in several places at the period, the members of such a society at Winchester in the twelfth century were said to gather at a certain place ‘to drink their guild’.¹ A clerical opponent of fraternities in the thirteenth century remarked caustically that: ‘if it were not for the feasting, few or none would come’.² In a similar vein of irony, the Tuscan rhetorician Boncompagno da Signa (d.1240) wrote that:

In many parts of Italy associations supposed to be charities are formed, which are popularly known as *confradaglie*. For these, simple ordinances are made, specifying how much wine or bread each member should bring. I say ‘supposed to be charities’, because many attach themselves to fraternities and consortia in diverse parts of the world, simply in order to fill their stomachs.³

¹ Martin Biddle, ed., *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages*, i (Oxford, 1976), 34, 355. In a later example at Hanslope in Buckinghamshire during the 1260s, adherents of the local fraternity of St Edmund said that they met in a member’s house ‘to have a drinking called a “guild”’ (‘convenierunt ibi ad quamdam potacionem faciendam que vocatur “gylde”’). *Select Cases from the Ecclesiastical Courts of the Province of Canterbury c.1200–1301*, ed. Norma Adams and Charles Donohue, Selden Society, 95 (1981), 102–12. I am grateful to David Postles for this reference.

² Pierre Michaud-Quantin, *Universitas: expressions du mouvement confraternel dans le Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1970), 188.

³ Boncompagno da Firenze, *Cedrus*, Quellen zur bayerischen und deutschen Geschichte, Band 9, Abteilung I (Munich, 1863), 125, cit. Roberto Greci, ‘Economia, religiosità, politica. Le

These remarks, however, cut less deeply than intended, since they deliberately underestimated the significance, for the diners, of the meal itself. It does indeed appear that all fraternities, so far as possible, held annual dinners for their memberships. The occasion might be relatively simple, depending upon resources. Some societies might settle for a communal drinking, and amongst the workers of the German towns, this was the preferred mode of celebration: the aspiration of every group of artisans, whether masters or journeymen, was to hold its own drinking club or *Trinkstube*.⁴ In the English urban context, by contrast, most groups contrived to lay on food in some guise: it was a secondary issue whether this should be a feast of many dishes, after the fashion of the aristocracy, or humble bread and cheese. 'Bread sharer' was an active meaning of the word 'companion' (from *cum pane*) in late-medieval England,⁵ and the common repast, however modest, was a normal way to give tangible expression to the companionship of the guild. A simple case may stand for all. A rural chapel in Lincolnshire was in the fourteenth century the scene of a yearly gathering, in late November, of men and women who made their way from scattered hamlets across that marshy landscape, to hold a dinner in the church. Each of these party-goers, the members of a guild of St Catherine and St Margaret, brought to their feast either a capon or a cock. Transcending the relatively simple form of their common meal was their declared ideal, by assembling for this occasion, 'of kindling a stronger love between them'.⁶

This was a widely expressed intention: the guild feast was held 'for the promotion of love and charity among the members'.⁷ The self-referential character of this expression points to an apparent paradox. As has been noted in previous chapters, the solidarity of the guild was defined by exclusion: the guest list was limited to those who had elected to be enrolled and who satisfied the criteria of the group. Once again, the egalitarian (Christian) ideal of immanent brotherhood and sisterhood was defined in terms of shared moral values, the preservation of which was ensured by the invocation of a transcendent (Christian) principle of division between those who deserved, and those who did not deserve to belong. The declaration of the goal of community thus contained its own contradiction. This was not a peculiarity of the medieval guilds, nor has it been confined to explicitly religious

solidarietà delle corporazioni medievali nell'Italia del Nord', in *Cofradías, gremios y solidaridades en la Europa medieval*, XIX Semana de Estudios Medievales, Estella, 1992 (Pamplona, 1993), 75–99, at p. 95.

⁴ Wilfried Reininghaus, *Die Entstehung der Gesellengilden im Spätmittelalter* (Wiesbaden, 1981), 66–7; Knut Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen und Lohnarbeiter. Untersuchungen zur oberrheinischen und oberdeutschen Stadtgeschichte des 14. bis 17. Jahrhundert* (Sigmaringen, 1985), 165.

⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'companion', 1 (c); *Middle English Dictionary*, ss.vv. 'compaignable' (a) and 'compaignie', 1 (b).

⁶ The National Archives (TNA): PRO C47/41/180: guild at Whaplode (Lincolnshire), founded 1336.

⁷ TNA: PRO C47/42/227: the guild of All Saints, Buxton (Norfolk), founded in 1384–5.

traditions: a long history of political and social thought in the West has been characterized by the same inseparable imbrication of contradictory principles of immanence and transcendence. Unity between the mass of human individuals is a fine ideal—but unity of what, on what basis? Any answer to this question produces segregation. The very act of articulating the goal of harmony requires the exclusion of an element deemed to be disharmonious.

In fact there appear to be not one but two paradoxes within the guild communities, both of which present themselves most starkly in the context of the festival which brought the members physically together. The first concerns the relation of the individual to the group. Each member had personal and selfish reasons to attend, or would not have been present. The motives of participants included an aspiration to status in local society, and the opportunity to cultivate advantageous business or political contacts. However, what brought the members together was the perception that all of these and other personal goals might best be advanced within the context and in the name of community. As was discussed in Chapter 1, there is a modern misunderstanding that individualism and community are incompatible: that the presence of one precludes the possibility of the other. Yet community itself is only ever realized in the experience of the individual. It is the individual who can perceive it as a value, choose to identify with it, and potentially incorporate it as part of his or her personality. The rites of the festival day offered to the brothers and sisters of a guild the opportunity, by the temporary lowering of the defences surrounding their particular identities, to open up to one another and to admit a controlled dosage of the collective ideology of the fraternity, thereby enabling the individual to recognize him- or herself not merely as a good and worthy person, but as a collaborator in the creation of something superior to and more admirable than anything achievable by the individual in isolation. Private motivation was therefore not the necessary enemy or contradiction of fraternal community but its very source.

The further apparent paradox concerns the relation between the restricted body of the guild and the larger mass of humanity. Chapter 2 reviewed the criticism of the guilds, articulated by some contemporaries, that their humanity was unchristian to the extent that it was defined: to set a limit on charity was to turn against the very principle of true fraternity. There was evidently a perceived potential for the fraternity to become a complacently self-regarding club of like-minded and morally untroubled householders. But that earlier discussion also noted the medieval response to this challenge: that the vastness of humanity made communication with all impracticable, and that Christ himself had prescribed beginning with one's neighbours. How far their interaction and their collective acts of charity had the effect of moderating the egotism and enlarging the humanity of fraternity members, and to what extent they included within the benefits of the guild those too poor to afford or to be considered sufficiently morally independent to become enrolled, will have

varied from case to case. But the rhetoric of the guilds invited participants to appropriate to themselves the dignified identity of one prepared to make a sacrifice of personal self-interest for the sake of a collective and a higher goal of mutual love. This persona was, at least, an attractive one, and while it may be presumed to have helped to persuade many of those who decided to join a guild, its appeal will also have continued to work upon the established member as he or she came regularly to enact, and so to internalize, the pious and charitable practices of the community. No guild claimed a monopoly on these values. On the contrary, every fraternity aimed to advertise an example which would inspire others to join or to form similar societies. The public charity, the processions, and the plays staged around the feast of a particular fraternity were among the means by which its ideals were communicated to others. The individual guild was a restricted body, but its values were infinitely extendable. This is not to pretend, of course, that these ideals did not encounter both resistance and indifference. But the continued recruitment of new members to thousands of guilds until their forcible suppression in 1547 is one indicator that their example inspired emulation.

More than an aspirational symbol, the feast was the collective embodiment of the guild in action.⁸ While its formal aspects lent it a ritualized dimension, we should be wrong to segregate the guild dinner from the everyday lives of its participants. Rather than as an emblem of peace, or a symbol of harmony, it makes better sense of the historical record to see the occasion as a distinctive social process, in the course of which novel interactions between members could be negotiated.⁹ The feast's defining rhetoric of honourable equality and commensality enabled new relationships to be forged, often between participants of different background or economic status. Meanwhile, the element of formality—which, while it varied greatly in degree, was vital to the event: this was a *special* dinner—invested the occasion, and its accompanying social exchanges and expressions of religious ideals, with a dignity and prestige with which individual participants could dress themselves as they stepped back into the quotidian world.

BREAD-SHARERS

Some guilds met for more frequent dinners, but the majority assembled for this purpose just once in the year. The fraternity meal invariably followed on

⁸ Initial thoughts on this subject were published as Gervase Rosser, 'Going to the fraternity feast: commensality and social relations in late medieval England'. *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), 430–46.

⁹ The turn to such a dynamic and creative understanding of ritual was effected by Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Process* (Oxford, 1992).

the patronal mass, to which it was linked also in more profound ways. At an early date, it seems to have been common for guilds to remain inside the church for their dinner, a practice which (despite clerical censure) was still recorded in certain areas as late as the sixteenth century.¹⁰ These features suggest that contemporaries may have associated the guild feast with another rite: that of the distribution, at the end of the parish mass, of holy bread (the *eulogia*). This *panis benedictus*, sometimes accompanied by a cup of wine, was usually provided by the parish, blessed (although not consecrated) by the priest, and shared among the congregation at the church door. The practice was widespread in both the Eastern and the Western Churches by the sixth century.¹¹ It seems reasonable to infer that its continued dissemination was particularly stimulated by the doctrinal debates on the eucharistic miracle which took place between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, whereby the bread of the mass was both elevated and at the same time removed from the sphere of normal lay participation.¹² The associated enhancement of the role of the priest, together with the rarity of lay communion—which seems, having been relatively frequent in the early Christian centuries, to have become increasingly uncommon after the sixth century, and especially after about 1000; the Council of 1215 established a minimal requirement of communion just once a year—created conditions in which the distribution at the end of mass of holy bread may well have acquired for the laity an intensified significance. Popular devotion to the consecrated host grew significantly from the eleventh century onwards, and a number of twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts indicate that it was reverence, not indifference, which discouraged frequent lay reception of the eucharist. The *eulogia*, meanwhile, came to be regarded as, at least in a partial sense, a surrogate for communion.¹³ While churchmen were at pains to insist on the distinction between holy bread and the eucharist, parishioners, who were themselves undoubtedly capable of recognizing the different and superior status of the mass, were nevertheless evidently glad to participate in a collective rite (householders took turns to provide the weekly loaf) which revived the commensality once enjoyed in the inclusive *agapē*, or love feast, of the early Christians.¹⁴ Occasionally the distribution of the holy loaf itself was undertaken by fraternities, as it was,

¹⁰ Instances cited in John Gordon Davies, *The Secular Use of Church Buildings* (London, 1968), 52.

¹¹ Peter Browe, *Die Pflichtkommunion im Mittelalter* (Münster, 1940), 188, 195.

¹² Peter Browe, *Die häufige Kommunion im Mittelalter* (Münster, 1938), 28–9 and ch. 1, *passim*.

¹³ Gary Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period: A Study of the Salvific Function of the Sacrament according to the Theologians, c.1080–c.1220* (Oxford, 1984), esp. pp. 86–93, 118–19 (the development of popular devotion to, and reverence for, the eucharist, and the rarity of lay reception), 93–4 (*eulogia* as a partial substitute).

¹⁴ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. W. J. McDonald, et al., 14 vols (New York, 1967), s.v. ‘agape’ (article by C. Bernas).

for example, in late-medieval Normandy.¹⁵ In a variant practice recorded in the towns of Languedoc, on the feast day of the Ascension of Christ, loaves baked by confraternity members were brought to the main square and there distributed to the poor. The sacramental dimension of this drama was no less evident than its charitable function.¹⁶ In the light of these other practices, the guild feast, whether or not partaken at the church, would to its participants have borne obvious analogies to the sharing of holy bread. Each of these activities, although differentiated from the mass, in significant ways invited comparison with the priestly miracle itself. Given that theologians from the twelfth century until the end of the Middle Ages were willing to state that a life of union with Christ in faith and love was sufficient to ensure salvation, without the added grace of holy communion, members of guilds might readily understand their own rites to have the power of a blessed sacrament.¹⁷

Like the holy bread, the fraternity dinner after the anniversary mass provided a continuing context for an older pattern of festal lay involvement in the Christian rite, which had been sidelined by clerical condemnations of profanity and indulgence. Concern about just such a blurring of distinctions between the canonical mass and lay practice at the margins helps to explain the otherwise remarkable bitterness of clerical attacks on guild feasts, which are recorded from the earliest Christian period onwards. The original condemnation was issued by St Paul in a letter to the people of Corinth, in which he warned against the debauchery and violence that he had heard characterized the communal meals they were holding in churches.¹⁸ Paul's censorious tone—'What! Have ye not houses to eat and drink in? Or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?'—would be echoed by churchmen down the centuries. Whereas the first Christian *agapai* had been closely associated with the eucharistic rite, in the course of the early medieval period the Church appears to have established a decorous separation, according to the clerical perspective, between distinct sacred and secular spheres.¹⁹ In a capitulary of 852, Hincmar of Reims denounced communal meals for the dead in which priests and laymen mingled, entertaining one another with 'idiotic tales', wearing masks, and playing obscene tricks. At the same time, however, Hincmar granted his approval of the decent gathering of lay congregations

¹⁵ Catherine Vincent, *Des charités bien ordonnées. Les confréries normandes de la fin du XIIIe siècle au début du XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1988), 250.

¹⁶ André Gouron, *La réglementation des métiers en Languedoc au Moyen Âge* (Geneva and Paris, 1958), 358–60.

¹⁷ Gary Macy, 'Theology of the eucharist in the high Middle Ages', in Ian Christopher Levy and Kristen van Ansdall, eds, *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2012), 365–98, at p. 391.

¹⁸ 1 Cor. 11.17–34.

¹⁹ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edn, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford, 1997), s.v. 'agape'.

after mass, with the distribution of the *eulogia* in the same fashion as is recorded in later centuries.²⁰ For clerical critics of the guilds, the perennial challenge was to discourage excesses of profanity while fostering the spiritual potential of fraternal assemblies. The strictures upon guild banquets issued by prelates of the period of the Catholic Reform in the sixteenth century are expressive of the same, continuing ambivalence.²¹

PROCESSIONAL

The grounds for intermittent clerical anxiety become clearer still when the sacramental observances of the fraternity meal are examined more closely. The processional overture to the event was choreographed with gravity in order to consecrate the setting both of the liturgical celebration of the feast in the mass and of the ensuing rites of the dinner. The guild members proceeded solemnly, two by two (*bini et bini lento passu*), to the church and thence, after the service, to the place of recreation—usually a member's house, a church house, or a guild-hall—dressed in the common livery (hoods or complete gowns, with the possible addition of badges) of their society.²² The ritual dress worn by the brothers and sisters conveyed no less serious a meaning than the vestments of the clergy, as was spelled out in the statutes of a Norman guild of St John at Saint-Lô, as these were read aloud to the assembled membership each year in the early sixteenth century:

In honour and reverence of St John, each brother shall wear a chaplet of three flowers upon the most noble part of the body, that is, the head. This chaplet signifies nobility, dignity, joy, honour, beauty, collective happiness (*liesse*), virtue, valour, sense and understanding, charity, love, strength and vigour. The number of flowers in this chaplet represents the great virtues, the miracles, and the good deeds and words of St John. The colours of the flowers in the chaplet are indicative of the Holy Trinity of Paradise, and they also signify these three particular qualities of St John: he was a patriarch, a prophet, and the flower of baptism. They further represent the three vestments worn by Our Lord Jesus Christ when he suffered the Passion: the first of these was yellow, the second crimson, and the third white. And they signify various other things.²³

²⁰ The text of Hincmar's capitulary is reproduced in G. G. Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis. Confraternite e pietà dei laici nel medioevo* (Rome, 1977), i. 37. For commentary see Otto Gerhard Oexle, 'Gilden als soziale Gruppen in der Karolingerzeit', in H. Jankuhn, W. Janssen, R. Schmidt-Wiegand, and H. Tiefenbach, eds, *Das Handwerk in vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Zeit*, i (Göttingen, 1981), 284–354, esp. pp. 311–12, 325–7.

²¹ Marc Venard, 'La fraternité des banquets', in J.-C. Margolin and R. Sauzet, eds, *Pratiques et discours alimentaires à la Renaissance* (Paris, 1982), 137–45.

²² For procession in pairs see e.g. *Cambridge Gild Records*, ed. Mary Bateson (Cambridge, 1903), 101, 112.

²³ Vincent, *Des charités bien ordonnées*, 245–6.

Guild inventories and accounts record banners, such as the Louth guild of St Mary's banner of the three kings of Cologne, which were carried on these ceremonial occasions through the streets of the town.²⁴ The Trinity guild of Luton paid 'for bearing the banner before the master and wardens';²⁵ and the Boston guild of St Mary paid 'the banner bearer' after the fraternity had participated in the general procession on the feast of Corpus Christi. The latter example may have been that listed in the fraternity's inventory of 1533 as 'a stained banner cloth of linen cloth with the image of Our Lady and certain images of men and women kneeling before her', or in other words, an image of Mary the Mother of Mercy protecting her devotees within the folds of her robe. The Latin term used here, *vexillum*, also described the processional banners carried by the clergy in liturgical ceremonies.²⁶ Even a relatively modest company such as the guild of All Saints at Wymondham in Norfolk recorded the name of its *vexillator* or banner-bearer.²⁷ The banners of the medieval guilds held, in the eyes of their members, enormous potency. A member of a Marian confraternity in Milan around 1300 wrote in verse:

She is our protectress, our guild patron:
 She defends everyone who wishes to stay in her flock;
 Against our enemies she is a very strong fighter;
 Blessed is that man or woman who stands under her banner.²⁸

The phrase 'under our banner' was often used to convey the sense of shared identity within the guilds. It stood for the presence of the depicted patron saint in the midst of the community and, as such, could command authority.

²⁴ Lincolnshire Archives Office, MS Monson 7/1, Accounts of the guild of St Mary, Louth, 1473–1504, fols 263–265^v: inventory of the guild's goods belonging to Our Lady's altar in St Mary's church, 1501. Another example in the guild of the Holy Cross at Stratford-upon-Avon: Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, MS BRT 1/3/81 (1468–9, note of arrears of contributions from members towards the cost of a banner of the guild).

²⁵ Bedford, Bedfordshire County Record Office, MS Z 486/1, Register and accounts of the guild of Holy Trinity, Luton, s.a. 1526–7; see the printed edition, *The Register of the Fraternity or Guild of the Holy and Undivided Trinity and Blessed Virgin Mary in the Parish Church of Luton*, ed. Henry Gough (London, 1906), 188.

²⁶ British Library, MS Egerton 2886, Accounts of the guild of St Mary, Boston, early 16th century, s.a. 1513–14; Boston, Lincolnshire, Municipal Buildings, MS 4/A/2/1A–B, Inventory of the goods of St Mary's guild, 2 July 25 Henry VIII.

²⁷ Wymondham, Norfolk, parish church of St Mary, Register book of the guild of All Saints, 1501–36, fol. 3 (1502).

²⁸ 'Quella è nostra tutrix, nostra confanonera: | ella defende zascun, ki vol star sego in sgiera; | contra li nostril guerrer ella è molt forte guerrera; | beao quel hom e femena ke sta soto soa bandera.' Bonvesin della Riva, c.1300, quoted in Andreas Dehmer, *Italienische Bruderschaftsbanner des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (Berlin, 2004), 140. Dehmer's book is the most significant publication on the subject; it is characteristic of the scope of existing scholarship in the field that its focus is confined to central Italy. See also Michael Bury, 'Documentary evidence for the materials and handling of banners, principally in Umbria, in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries', in Caroline Villers, ed., *The Fabric of Images: European Paintings on Textile Supports in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (London, 2000), 19–30.

A thirteenth-century guild of the Madonna at Cortona possessed a standard of the Virgin to which the members rallied when it was necessary to suppress outbreaks of violence between factions in the city.²⁹

At the feast of Corpus Christi in Coventry, the guild of that dedication, all clothed in livery, conveyed through the city an image of the body of Christ, surrounded by eight torches.³⁰ Other societies on the patronal day bore in procession great torches to offer to the patron saint in the church, such as the 'beautiful square candle' carried through Lincoln by the brothers and sisters of St Anne's guild, to be left burning before the image of the saint in the parish church of St Peter.³¹ The members of St Peter's fraternity at Lawshall in Norfolk, who had been moved to found their guild by a concern that there were insufficient lights in the parish church, made an annual procession in bare feet to renew these.³² The lighting of a candle was, in fact, commonly the act of first foundation of a fraternity. The lights of a guild were a vital expression of its identity, to the extent that German civic authorities, wishing to limit the collective gatherings of journeymen, forbade them to have fraternity candles.³³

In the case of the Holy Trinity guild at Ingham in Norfolk, the focus of the feast day procession was known as 'the flower': a jewel newly commissioned by the members each year and kept thereafter as part of the fraternity treasure displayed in the church of the local priory.³⁴ A guild of the same dedication at King's Lynn was the keeper of the *gesyn*, or Christmas crib. This was the object of a special cult, and on festival days was carried through the streets of the town by the fraternity.³⁵ At the Lincolnshire port town of Boston, the emblem of the guild of St Mary was 'Noah's ship'. Mounted on wheels and pulled in procession through the town on feast days by eight or nine men, this was a substantial vessel, with masts and rigging and a banner aloft. Expenses on sulphur when the ship went about imply the setting off of fireworks.³⁶ Each of

²⁹ Dehmer, *Italianische Bruderschaftsbanner*, 69. For the phrase 'under the banner', see pp. 86–7.

³⁰ TNA: PRO C 47/46/436; printed in Joshua Toulmin Smith and Lucy Toulmin Smith, eds, *English Gilds*, Early English Text Society, original series, 40 (1870), 232.

³¹ TNA: PRO C 47/40/137(a). The thirteen members of the Corpus Christi guild of Oxborough each carried a lighted taper in the annual procession. TNA: PRO C 47/44/313.

³² TNA: PRO C 47/46/430.

³³ Reininghaus, *Entstehung der Gesellengilden*, 126–7; Peter Löffler, *Studien zum Totenbrauchtum* (Münster, 1975), 187 ff.

³⁴ TNA: PRO C 47/42/236.

³⁵ S. J. Kahrl, 'Secular life and popular piety in medieval English drama', in T. J. Heffernan, ed., *The Popular Literature of Medieval England* (Knoxville, TN, 1985), 85–107, at pp. 89–90.

³⁶ British Library, MS Egerton 2886, Accounts of the guild of St Mary, Boston, early 16th century, fol. 5^v: 1514–15 (repairs to the *naviculum Noe vocatum* 'Noeship'); fol. 32^v: 1515–16 (including expenses for sulphur when the ship was carried); fol. 88^v: 1517–18 (repairs to 'the banner shaft' and a new set of wheels); fol. 183: 1521–2 (purchase of soap, presumably to grease the wheels, when the ship was carried about the town of Boston at Pentecost and Corpus Christi).

these processions, whether more or less grand in scale, staged the town as a sacred theatre, or even as the site of human salvation, and the guild as a catalyst of harmony and renewal for the entire community.

REHEARSING ROLES

In their contribution to that process of salvation, the guilds appropriated to themselves and mediated to their neighbours the major themes of Christian teaching. Very many of the new fraternities of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries laid particular emphasis on repentance, on the part both of their members and others, with repeated reference to the salvific significance of the Passion of Christ.³⁷ A number developed this message into dramatic representations for performance in the city streets, typically around the time of the relevant feast day, enhancing the potential for a wide impact. The earliest known vernacular plays in Italy were simplified dramatizations of the Passion, enacted in a few documented cases before 1300 by members of *compagnie*, or confraternities; from these there developed the *sacre rappresentazioni*, performed in subsequent centuries by guilds and other groups.³⁸ In the Italian context from the fifteenth century onwards it is also evident that the regular carrying in procession of a *cassa processionale*, a more-or-less elaborate image of the crucified Christ or of a patronal saint, fostered within the confraternities a dramatic aspect with an evident didactic and moral purpose, frequently linked to a general call to repentance.³⁹ Instances which can be cited from medieval England, such as the ritualized washing of the feet of poor people by members of a guild at Ipswich, in memory of Christ's washing of the feet of the Apostles before his execution;⁴⁰ the representation in pageant of the finding of the Cross of Christ by St Helen, enacted by a guild of that dedication at Beverley;⁴¹ the play of Christ's Ascension put on by a fraternity at Sleaford

³⁷ Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis*, i. 265–512.

³⁸ On the beginnings of drama in Italy, see Alessandro D'Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano*, 2 vols, 2nd edn (Turin, 1891); Emilio Faccioli, *Il teatro italiano*, vol. i, *Dalle origini al Quattrocento* (Turin, 1975).

³⁹ For instances of such a collective dramatization of the call to repentance see Daniel Bornstein, *The Bianchi of 1399: Popular Devotion in Late Medieval Italy* (Ithaca and London, 1993). For an example of a region of Italy—Liguria—particularly rich in the processional and dramatic manifestations of its fraternities, see Fausta Franchini Guelfi, *Le casacce: arte e tradizione* (Genoa, 1974).

⁴⁰ John Wodderspoon, *Memorials of the Ancient Town of Ipswich* (Ipswich, 1850), 161–3: ordinances of 1325.

⁴¹ TNA: PRO C 47/46/446; paraphrased in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 148–9: ordinances of 1378.

in Lincolnshire;⁴² and the play put on at the feast of Corpus Christi by a guild of that dedication at Bury St Edmunds,⁴³ all exemplify the confraternal invitation, addressed to the larger community of the town, to a change of life.

Complementing the penitential and sacrificial themes of many guilds was another, more celebratory aspect, devoted to the praise of the saints and in particular of the Virgin Mary. Again, some of the earliest examples are recorded in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy, as confraternities of *laudi* or hymns to the Virgin.⁴⁴ An English case in point is the evocative procession orchestrated by a guild of the Purification of the Virgin Mary at Beverley, founded in 1355. A male member of the society was chosen to go, 'most nobly and decently attired', like the Virgin, in solemn procession to the parish church of St Mary. Others played the parts of two attending angels, Joseph, and the high priest Simeon, and 'Mary' was accompanied by the female and male members of the guild, separately grouped. As in the Italian cases, the scene was enhanced by a choral celebration of the Virgin.⁴⁵ The towns of northern France have also left traces of relatively elaborate poetic and musical drama, choreographed once more by local guilds, here known as *chambres de rhétorique*. Their lay members drew on secular traditions of poetic and musical improvisation to compose plays, songs, and poems, usually religious in theme, which were judged and performed either at feasts or on carts in the public street.⁴⁶ Across the Channel, the London society of the Puy, which is documented around 1300, was a similarly sophisticated cultural gathering, in which new compositions in verse and music by members were submitted to experienced judges and then performed in a context which was redolent at once of the theatre and of the guilds.⁴⁷ A number of provincial English guilds also cultivated a creative musical tradition, such as the guild of the Virgin Mary at Boston, which at the end of the Middle Ages enjoyed a national reputation for the quality of its musical performances. The composer John Tavener, as a member of the chapel royal, recruited singers from the

⁴² E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1903), i. 395: the recorded performance took place in 1480.

⁴³ TNA: PRO C 47/46/401: the performance is described as an *interludum*. In 1388–9 the guild was said to have been existence for 'time without memory'.

⁴⁴ Both penitential and *laudesi* groups in Florence are discussed in John Henderson, *Piety and Charity in Late Medieval Florence* (Oxford, 1994). See also Blake Wilson, *Music and Merchants: The Laudesi Companies of Republican Florence* (Oxford, 1992).

⁴⁵ TNA: PRO C 47/46/448.

⁴⁶ Henri Liebrecht, *Les chambres de rhétorique* (Brussels, 1948); Jan van der Stock et al., *La Ville en Flandre: culture et société 1477–1787* (Brussels, 1991), 172, 538–9, with references.

⁴⁷ Although the London Puy looks very like a guild, its precise nature remains elusive. Anne F. Sutton, 'Merchants, music and social harmony: the London Puy and its French and London contexts, circa 1300', *London Journal*, 17 (1992), 1–17; Sutton, 'The "Tumbling Bear" and its patrons: a venue for the London Puy and mercery', in Julia Boffey and Pamela King, eds, *London and Europe in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1995), 85–110.

guild at Boston in the 1520s, and became master of the choir there in 1530.⁴⁸ At Louth in the same county of Lincolnshire during the decades before the Reformation, a guild of Our Lady employed its own choirmaster and made annual distributions to a group of some eight singers, who each evening sang a votive antiphon in front of a crowned image of the Virgin. This daily event, orchestrated by the guild, drew in others, for a common box received contributions to the 'anthem lights' or candles which accompanied the ritual, and to the 'anthem bell' which summoned the townspeople at the end of the day's work to participate in the service.⁴⁹ In such ways the guilds acted as catalysts for the engagement both of their members and of others in the wider social environment.

The guilds exemplify that recurrent theme in the history of the Church which is the appropriation and translation of universal doctrine by local and particular communities. Through their variously differentiated devotions, they gave expression to a desire for a religion rooted in the experience and concerns of specific places. By a similar process of localization, in the plays which, from the second half of the fourteenth century, the crafts of various towns undertook to stage at the feast of Corpus Christi, Christ became a citizen of York, and Chester was remade as Jerusalem. The religious play cycles presented at this time of year in these and other towns originated with the crafts themselves, even if, over time, civic authorities came to exercise oversight of the events.⁵⁰ While little is known about the precise fourteenth-century origins of the 'mystery plays', their moral themes share the same cultural language as the fraternities which were maintained by many, if not all, of the bodies of craftsmen which undertook to present them. Like the members of the guilds in their other aspects and activities, the craftsmen (and possibly women) who presented characters in these spectacles, generally performing on carts in the streets of the town, challenged comfortable assumptions about human

⁴⁸ *The Itinerary of John Leland*, ed. Thomas Hearne, vii, part 1 (London, 1744), 37; Roger Bowers, 'The cultivation and promotion of music in the household and orbit of Thomas Wolsey', in S. J. Gunn and Philip Lindley, eds, *Cardinal Wolsey: Church, State and Art* (Cambridge, 1991), 178–218, at p. 190.

⁴⁹ Magnus Williamson, 'The role of religious guilds in the cultivation of ritual polyphony in England: the case of Louth, 1450–1550', in Fiona Kisby, ed., *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Cities and Towns* (Cambridge, 2001), 82–93, at p. 87.

⁵⁰ Martin Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual, Contextual and Critical Interpretations* (Princeton, 1987), 106–28; *Records of Early English Drama: York*, ed. Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, 2 vols (Toronto, 1979); *Records of Early English Drama: Chester*, ed. Lawrence Clopper (Toronto, 1979). The case that the plays were conceived originally within civic government is presented in R. B. Dobson, 'Craft guilds and city: The historical origins of the York mystery plays reassessed', in A. E. Knight, ed., *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), 91–106. But see also Gervase Rosser, 'Myth, image and social process in the English medieval town', *Urban History*, 23 (1996), 5–25, at pp. 18–19; and Jeremy Goldberg, 'Craft guilds, the Corpus Christi play and civic government', in Sarah Rees Jones, ed., *The Government of Medieval York* (York, 1997), 141–63.

relationships and provoked their audiences to consider the terms on which they lived together. The play scripts rarely show individuals as simply good or bad, but reveal traits with which viewers could readily identify, drawing them to participate in an experience which, through the effects of shock, irony, or humour, might alter the ways in which the townspeople regarded and treated one another. By the blurring of moral boundaries in the plays, the viewer could find him- or herself made uncomfortably aware of the relativity of attitudes previously taken for granted. Moments of disturbing moral ambiguity occur in the York cycle, for example, in the *Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise*, in which the question of blame is very much to the fore; in the witty refusal of Noah's wife to fall in with his plan and God's in the play of *The Deluge*; in the moving dialogue between Abraham and Isaac, when the latter understands that God has ordered his father to kill him; in Joseph's initial denunciation of his wife when her pregnancy is discovered; in Judas's mournful repentance.⁵¹ When Antichrist, in the Chester plays, misappropriates to himself the characteristics of Christ in a parodic 'Descent into Hell', the beholder is challenged to rethink his or her responsibility to engage honestly with Christ's example: not as a remote image of divine power, but as a sharply pointed moral imperative requiring complete honesty about the personal motives which determine present action or indifference.⁵² That the saints, and even Christ himself, could appear in these performances as townspeople of York or Coventry or Chester, was not a gauche blasphemy. Rather, it was a deliberately disturbing strategy intended to provoke participants—whether actors or audience—to engage with, and potentially to be transformed by, the moral issues raised in the narrative of the plays.⁵³

THE PEOPLE'S MASS

The collective identity of the guild itself received its profoundest and most complete expression in the fraternity mass. The appropriation by the laity of a role of spiritual leadership, in the construction of a community which was at once both temporal and transcendental, was here at its most marked and evident. Here the dead received equal attention with the living, former members being commemorated by name and intercessory prayers being offered on

⁵¹ *York Plays*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith (Oxford, 1885), 32–4, 48–9, 62–5, 108, 311–12.

⁵² David Mills, 'The Chester Cycle', in Richard Beadle, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (Cambridge, 1994), 125–51, at pp. 130–2.

⁵³ V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, CA, 1966); Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago and London, 2000), 138–68.

behalf of their souls in purgatory.⁵⁴ Many who joined a guild enrolled at the same time their deceased parents, to include these in the spiritual benefits of the fraternity masses; and all could expect like commemoration in their turn.⁵⁵ The calendar or register of members would be on view as testimony to this holistic vision of the company. The priest or priests hired to minister to the society wore vestments bearing the iconography of the guild. The first to be listed in the early sixteenth-century inventory of the Boston guild of St Mary was of white damask silk, embroidered with golden eagles shown standing on books and with texts around their heads, while the accompanying decorative orphrey showed a scene of the life of Our Lady.⁵⁶ Many guilds possessed their own sacred relics, which on the occasion of the communal mass would be prominently displayed as guarantees of the presence of the holy patrons. Those of this guild at Boston included part of the finger of St Anne, the Virgin's mother, enclosed in a silver reliquary in the form of a hand, and a relic of Mary's milk, contained in a silver-gilt case decorated with an image of the Virgin and Child.⁵⁷

Not every guild enjoyed the possession of authenticated relics of the saints; but even a society of modest resources might boast a prestigious image, of renowned beauty or even reputed to be, in its own right, miraculous. The origin of the guild of St John the Baptist at Spalding in Lincolnshire was the commission by a local man of 'a beautiful image' of the saint. This was in 1358; in 1383 several parishioners agreed to form a fraternity which could support a chaplain celebrating regularly in the presence of this image.⁵⁸ In the case of a Grantham guild of the Holy Cross, it was a new carving of the Crucifixion scene, with the cross of Christ flanked by Mary and St John, which catalysed the foundation of an associated guild.⁵⁹ These images were locally renowned, the more so once promoted by their respective guilds; but the Holy Trinity guild of Bishop's Lynn was established to employ a chaplain and maintain a light before an image of the Trinity which, more momentously, was widely held to cure the sick and to work other miracles.⁶⁰ While their ecclesiastical context lent them respectability and authority, such image cults almost invariably (as in this case) originated with the laity and were maintained by them despite the frequent scepticism of bishops, as direct means of access to the divine realm.⁶¹ This example at Bishop's Lynn epitomizes the overwhelmingly lay direction of religious experience within the guilds.

⁵⁴ See further Chapter 6.

⁵⁵ e.g. Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, MS BRT 1/1; printed as *The Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross, St Mary and St John the Baptist, Stratford-upon-Avon*, ed. Mairi Macdonald (Stratford-upon-Avon, 2007).

⁵⁶ Boston, Lincolnshire, Municipal Buildings, MS 4/A/2/1A-B.

⁵⁷ Boston, Lincolnshire, Municipal Buildings, MS 4/A/2/1A-B.

⁵⁸ TNA: PRO C 47/41/166.

⁵⁹ TNA: PRO C 47/40/111.

⁶⁰ TNA: PRO C 47/43/275.

⁶¹ Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge, 1989), esp. pp. 203–20. In general see Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present* (London, 2013).

The gathered body of the guild brothers and sisters was endowed with still greater coherence where its services were conducted in a dedicated fraternity chapel. In such cases the form and iconography of the space reinforced the sense of participation in a community which was united at a sacred centre, subject to its own patronage, and whose history was bound up with the larger working out of Christian providence. In the parish church of Ludlow, the palmers' guild in the later Middle Ages had control of the chapel of St John the Evangelist. Here they commissioned, early in the fifteenth century, a series of stained glass windows depicting the foundation legend of the fraternity. This appropriated to Ludlow a story first told about St Edward the Confessor, who was said to have given his ring to a beggar, only to have this brought back to him with the revelation that the mendicant had been John the Evangelist. According to the version told in the guild, and related in the glass, the saint revealed himself to two pilgrims from Ludlow while they were travelling in the Holy Land, and asked them to return the jewel to their king. In the concluding scenes of the window series, the men of Ludlow are shown first delivering the ring at court, and finally, having arrived home, relating their adventures in a festive scene evocative of the later meetings of the palmers' guild (Fig. 4).⁶²

A EUCHARISTIC FEAST

Following the assembly in church, the ensuing celebrations surrounding the dinner elaborated in various ways upon the liturgy of the mass. The

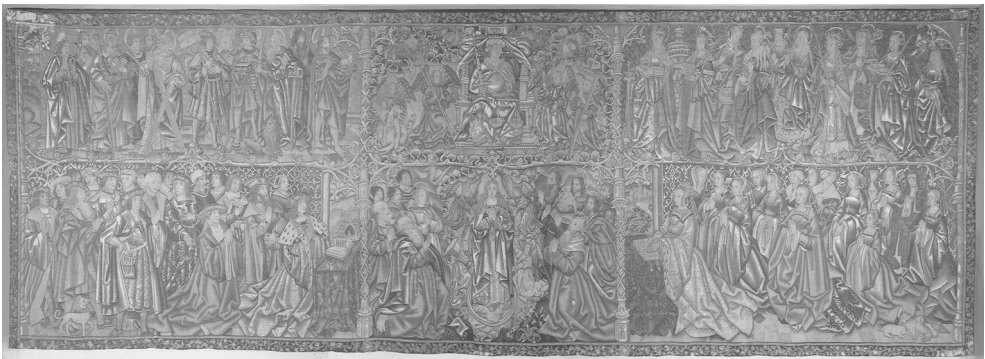


Fig. 5 Tapestry of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in St Mary's Guildhall, Coventry, late fifteenth century. (The figure of Justice in the upper centre is a sixteenth-century replacement.) Photo: Christian Liddy.

⁶² E. W. Ganderton and J. Lafond, *Ludlow Stained and Painted Glass* (Ludlow, 1961), 46–53, pls 7–9; Christian Liddy, 'The palmers' guild window in St Lawrence's church, Ludlow: a study of

refinement of the ceremony varied with resources: where the dinner was held in the house of one of the brothers or sisters, as was typical of the smaller guilds, the ritual will have been correspondingly modest, yet its perceived significance will have been no less than it was in grander situations.⁶³ In some, and perhaps many, cases the relatively substantial house of a guild member, at first used as the domestic setting for the feast, was adapted over time to become the formally designated hall of the society.⁶⁴ At the feast of St Peter's guild at Wisbech in Cambridgeshire in the fourteenth century, great candles were lit while prayers were said in the hall for the membership, living and dead.⁶⁵ The Trinity guild of the same town ordered in 1470 that

In every principal day, after dinner and supper, the dean shall proclaim with an open voice that every man and woman shall pray devoutly for the souls of all the brothers and sisters of the guild and for all Christian souls, and to keep silence while the guild priest shall say grace and 'de profundis' for all Christian souls.⁶⁶

Surviving halls of some of the more wealthy civic guilds give an indication of the theatrical magnificence which in these cases framed the fraternity feast (Fig. 6).⁶⁷ In the hall of the Boston guild of Our Lady was displayed a framed text of prayers to be sung to the Virgin.⁶⁸ The hall and dinner of the London tailors' fraternity of St John the Baptist in the fifteenth century were presided over by a carved image of the holy patron.⁶⁹ St Mary's guildhall in Coventry

the construction of guild identity in stained glass', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 72 (1997), 26–37. For wood carvings (no longer extant) representing the same story, commissioned by the guild in 1524 for the east wall of the chapel, below the fraternity window, see Henry T. Weyman, 'A contract for carvings in Ludlow church, 1524–5', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 3rd series, 3 (1903), 'Miscellanea', pp. i–ii.

⁶³ e.g. TNA: PRO C 47/41/179: the guild of St Mary at Swineshead (Lincolnshire), in which each year one of the members undertook to provide the dinner at home.

⁶⁴ For cases in London see John Schofield, *Medieval London Houses* (New Haven and London, 1994), 44.

⁶⁵ TNA: PRO C 47/38/41.

⁶⁶ Wisbech, Town Museum, Records of the guild of the Holy Trinity (1379–1547), 35.

⁶⁷ Kate Giles, *An Archaeology of Social Identity: Guildhalls in York, c.1350–1630* (Oxford, 2000); Giles, 'Framing labour: the archaeology of York's medieval guildhalls', in James Bothwell, P. J. P. Goldberg and W. M. Ormrod, eds, *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England* (York, 2000), 65–83; Giles, 'English guildhalls', in Martin Carver and Jan Klápště, eds, *The Archaeology of Medieval Europe*, 2 vols (Aarhus, 2011), i. 396–9.

⁶⁸ Boston, Municipal Buildings, MS 4/A/2/1B. In this inventory, under 'hall', is listed: 'A table covered with parchment noted with anthems of Our Lady with three collects and covered with linen cloth.' The date of the inventory is 2 July 1533. This inventory is further discussed by Kate Giles, '"A table of alabaster with the story of the Doom": the religious objects and spaces of the guild of Our Blessed Virgin, Boston (Lincs)', in Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, eds, *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham, 2010), 267–85.

⁶⁹ Matthew Davies and Ann Saunders, *The History of the Merchant Taylors' Company* (Leeds, 2004), 31.

was in the later Middle Ages the splendid setting for meetings both of the combined fraternity of the Holy Trinity, St Mary, St John the Baptist, and St Catherine, and of the civic government. Hierarchy was inscribed into the building no less than would have been found in one of the older halls of the secular aristocracy. The seniors of the guild dined on a raised dais at one end of the hall, on the wall behind which there still hangs a magnificent late-medieval tapestry whose iconography celebrated the common spiritual patronage of both the guild and the town (Fig. 5).⁷⁰ Another prominent guild of the Assumption of Our Lady, that based in Westminster, at the end of the fifteenth century enjoyed for its major, triennial feast the use of the great hall of the town house in King Street of the archbishop of York. The hall was hung with Marian decorations and servants were dressed in liveries of Our Lady, bearing her lily. Members of the guild were provided with gilt badges ('brooches') of the fraternity to wear, and with garlands made of crimson velvet, lined with blue silk. A band of musicians performed, and players presented 'a play'. This was one of the grander fraternity feasts: the menu extended from prawns to turbot, from herons to swans, from conies to sides of beef, all spiced with saffron, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, pepper, and mace, and simultaneously sweetened with honey, grapes, and prunes, and the splendid fare was accompanied by good ale and claret wine.⁷¹

But whether the repast was magnificent or relatively modest, the ceremonial framing of the occasion infused the sharing of meat and drink with sacred meaning. A Lincoln fraternity, also of the Assumption, begun in 1373, opened three barrels of ale in the course of its annual drinking: at the breaking of the first, the guild's ordinances were read out; at the second, intercession was offered for the dead; and at the third, the Virgin was appealed to on behalf of living members.⁷² The members of the Corpus Christi guild of Grantham, founded early in the same century, closed their celebration with a hymn.⁷³ The termination of the feast was the normal time for the admission of new members, whose solemn oath sworn upon the gospels, together with the exchange amongst all those present of a fraternal kiss of peace, lent this rite the semblance of baptism into a new life.⁷⁴ During the dinner, wine was circulated in a common drinking vessel, either a horn or else a cup, whose

⁷⁰ Christian Liddy, 'Urban politics and material culture at the end of the Middle Ages: the Coventry tapestry in St Mary's Hall', *Urban History*, 39 (2012), 203–24. The iconography of the tapestry was edited at the Protestant Reformation by the replacement of the upper central element of the image of the Holy Trinity by a representation of Justice. For the guild, see G. Templeman, ed., *The Records of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, St. Mary, St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine of Coventry*, Dugdale Society, 19 (1944).

⁷¹ Westminster Abbey Muniment Room, Accounts of the guild of Our Lady's Assumption, 1487–90; an extract concerning the feast held in 1490 (*sic*) printed in H. F. Westlake, *St Margaret's Westminster: The Church of the House of Commons* (London, 1914), 54–7.

⁷² TNA: PRO C 47/40/140(b).

⁷³ TNA: PRO C 47/40/109.

⁷⁴ e.g. *Cambridge Gild Records*, 94. See also Chapter 2 in the present study.

resemblance to the eucharistic chalice did not pass unnoticed by clerical observers. A drinking-horn which may have belonged to the Cambridge Corpus Christi guild survives today in the possession of the academic college of the same dedication which was founded in 1352, shortly after the moment at which the guild was later said to have been given the horn, by the amalgamation of this fraternity with another of the Virgin Mary (Fig. 3).⁷⁵ The exceptionally fine mid-fourteenth-century gilt and enamelled vessel in King's Lynn, known since the sixteenth century as 'the King John cup', may have belonged to the Trinity guild, the most prestigious body of that town before the Reformation, which claimed King John as a founder.⁷⁶ In any event, such a wealthy society as this could boast several splendid cups, some decorated with the image of the Holy Trinity, which could be passed around at the feast.⁷⁷ One such mazer in the store of the Virgin Mary's guild at Boston, and another in that of the Trinity guild of Coventry, were decorated in the bottom with the image of the Veronica: to drink, in a virtually sacramental ceremony, from this vessel was to come face to face with Christ.⁷⁸ It appears to have been an attempt to establish a degree of ecclesiastical control through authentication which led to the grant of episcopal indulgences to those guild members who drank 'soberly' and 'devoutly' from the 'pardon mazer' of the York Corpus Christi guild, or from 'St Julian's horn', in the possession of the fraternity of St Giles and St Julian at Lynn.⁷⁹ Implicit in these episcopal interventions is the recognition that the loving cup already possessed, in the eyes of those who shared it, a liturgical aspect.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski, eds, *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200–1400* (London, 1987), 438 (entry by Marion Campbell); Catherine P. Hall, 'The gild of Corpus Christi and the foundation of Corpus Christi College: an investigation of the documents', in Patrick Zutshi, ed., *Medieval Cambridge: Essays on the Pre-Reformation University* (Woodbridge, 1993), 65–91. Hall exposes the lack of documentary foundation for the later account of the horn's origin; but the older parts of the mount are of early 14th-century date and given the object's early ownership by the college, the claim of an association with the guild is plausible.

⁷⁶ Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, 435–6; John Cherry, 'King John's cup', in J. McNeill, ed., *King's Lynn and the Fens* (Leeds, 2008), 1–16.

⁷⁷ Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, MS King's Lynn KL C 38/16: inventory of the Trinity guild of King's Lynn, 1437–8. Included are a bowl and cover (weight 52 oz.); another (51 oz.) with an image of the Trinity; another, also with the Trinity (44 oz.); another (28 oz.); another, with leopards (31 oz.); another, with a silver cover with three angels (20 oz.); another (28 oz.); a new standing cup and cover recently bought by John Parmenter, alderman of the guild (48 oz.).

⁷⁸ Boston, Lincolnshire, Municipal Buildings, MS 4/A/2/1A–B, Inventory of the goods of St Mary's guild, 2 July 25 Henry VIII (1533); Templeman, ed., *Records of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, St. Mary, St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine of Coventry*, ii.146: inventory of the Trinity guild, 1441.

⁷⁹ *The Register of the Guild of Corpus Christi in the City of York; with an Appendix of Illustrative Documents*, ed. R. H. Skaife, Surtees Society, 57 (1872), 291–2; W. Richards, *The History of Lynn*, 2 vols (Lynn, 1812), ii. 436 (the horn of St Julian was commissioned for this Lynn guild in 1394–5: Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, MS King's Lynn Gd.37, *sub anno*). The guild of St John the Baptist at Grantham possessed no fewer than three 'horns from which the brothers and sisters are accustomed to drink on the day of the feast' (TNA: PRO C 47/40/113).

As the wine circulated, a minstrel might have stepped into the circle to entertain the company with stories of the saintly object of its devotion. From Acle near Norwich there survives a lengthy verse celebration of the life of St Anne, which was certainly delivered at gatherings of a local fraternity with this dedication. The yeoman who copied this text, together with others relating to the same saint, into his notebook around 1500 was the son of a local carpenter who, having learned to write, probably became the local reeve and served as alderman of another guild in the parish. The verse narrative of St Anne contains several addresses to an audience, including its opening lines which are a call to attention:

Sovereigns and sirs, if it be your will
To hear and to learn of thing that is good
From trifles and tales keep your tongues still,
And hear this matter with a mild mood.

After an extended narration of St Anne's three marriages and her bringing up of the Virgin Mary, the final stanzas invoke a blessing on the guild:

And Mary and her mother maintain this guild,
To the worship of God, and of his pleasance,
And all that it maintain, be it man or child,
God of his high grace give them good chance.
Good end and good life may they all have,
And Christian folk, our foe and our friend,
And God save all that all things may save,
And bring us to the bliss that lasteth without end.⁸⁰

The combined prayer for the present company and for all Christian people was a typical note, characteristic of the way in which the guilds looked at once inwards to their own membership (as they did most emphatically at the feast dinner) and outwards to the world in which they aspired to work as a leaven.

ENTERTAINING ANGELS

'Let brotherly love continue', St Paul wrote to the Hebrews, and he went on: 'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.'⁸¹ To a limited yet significant degree, the principles of

⁸⁰ *The Commonplace Book of Robert Reynes of Acle*, ed. Cameron Louis (New York and London, 1980), 196–228; see also pp. 27–35, 191–5, 228–34. The other texts in the book relating to St Anne and the Virgin also contain expressions indicative of live performance at a festive gathering. For the guild of St Anne in the local priory of Weybridge, see Francis Blomefield, *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, 5 vols (Fersfield, 1739–55), v. 1459.

⁸¹ Heb. 13.1–2.

fraternity were extended directly from the guild to others in the form of charity at the feast.⁸² In a striking number of instances the poor were physically present, being given a more-or-less formal role in the ritual. In rare instances, every poor person was said to be welcome to the fraternity dinner.⁸³ At the guild of St Peter at Wighenham in Norfolk in the late fourteenth century,

whatever man of God shall come to our fraternity, he shall have meat and drink so long as they last, and also a taper to burn before [the image of] St Peter of a pound of wax.⁸⁴

In general, as has already been observed of the charity of the guilds, the practical scale of immediate relief offered in this way was evidently less important than the ceremonially enhanced force of the example.⁸⁵ In such generosity there was a further unconscious echo of those early Christian *agapai* which had regularly incorporated an element of charity—the word with which the Greek term *agapē* was most commonly translated until relatively recent times.⁸⁶ At the level of consciousness, the guild in this way advertised its virtue and honour by behaving hospitably in the manner, first and foremost, of good Christians. Secular lordship provided a secondary model for such hospitality,⁸⁷ but the closer parallel and more powerful example was the collective charity of the monastic community. Following a Benedictine pattern, the door might be opened once the guild officers had finished eating, so that the poor could come in to dine on the leftovers.⁸⁸ An early sixteenth-century ordinance of the Holy Trinity guild of Wisbech declared:

When the aldermen and his brethren have dined we will that all the poor people then there present shall be set at a table in the hall, and served with such meat as shall be left [by] the said alderman and his brethren.⁸⁹

Sometimes the apostolic number of thirteen poor people was entertained at the feast; or the total, equally indicative of the liturgical resonance of the occasion, might be thirty, the age of Christ when he began his worldly

⁸² Sheila Lindenbaum, 'Rituals of exclusion: feasts and plays of the English religious fraternities', in Meg Twycross, ed., *Festive Drama* (Cambridge, 1996), 54–65, is reductive on these points, falling definitively as it does into the Manichaean division between positive and negative views of the fraternities which has been discussed in Chapter 1.

⁸³ TNA: PRO C 47/44/321: the guild of St James at Sall (Norfolk), founded in 1358–9. Every poor person coming to the *convivium* was to be fed there and to receive in addition ¼d. from every member.

⁸⁴ TNA: PRO C 47/45/362.

⁸⁵ See pp. 78–86 of the present study.

⁸⁶ See p. 124 n. 19.

⁸⁷ Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), esp. pp. 320, 331–2.

⁸⁸ Barbara Harvey, *Living and Dying in England, 1100–1540* (Oxford, 1993), 13.

⁸⁹ Wisbech, Town Museum, Records of the guild of the Holy Trinity, 63 (1506). The spirit of the fraternity charities described here was partially echoed in the medieval custom of holding ad hoc 'ales' for immediate charitable purposes. See Judith M. Bennett, 'Conviviality and charity in medieval and early modern England', *Past and Present*, 134 (1992), 19–41.

mission.⁹⁰ Another model was that of a guild of St Mary at Lincoln, which entertained at its feast as many poor people as there were brothers and sisters of the society present. The society thus presented its members with a specular image of their own humanity as the poor of Christ.⁹¹ Similarly at Grantham in the late fourteenth century, every married couple or single person in the Corpus Christi guild brought a pauper to the dinner.⁹² Likewise in St Lawrence's guild at Lincoln at the same period, as many of the poor as there were members were invited to join part of the feasting, for some good bread and ale and a dish of meat or fish.⁹³ In other East Anglian cases, the place of a member unable to attend the feast might be filled by a poor guest of the society.⁹⁴ Yet other fraternities simply made collections at their dinners, either of food or money, for subsequent distribution to the poor or the sick.⁹⁵ Participation in such exemplary almsgiving enabled fraternity members, most of whom were themselves endeavouring with limited resources to avoid falling into poverty and to establish a position in society, to forge a morally respectable identity, at once honest and philanthropic.

While it thus demonstrated a number of close analogies with the liturgy of the mass, the guild feast was nevertheless a significantly different kind of occasion. The active and celebratory roles which it accorded to its lay participants were precisely the elements which had tended to be excluded from the Catholic liturgy by successive reforms between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries. The legislation of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 was decisive in its definitive separation of the priest, uniquely endowed with the responsibility of mediating Christ's real earthly presence in the mass, from ordinary mortals.⁹⁶ Against this background, the fraternity banquet was an occasion at which all present might recover some of the spiritual dignity and moral authority which had been officially arrogated to the priesthood. It would be wrong to conclude that the mass had been asocialized and its congregations alienated: that it retained not only a vital salvific function but a valued social dimension, at least throughout the later medieval centuries, has rightly been underlined.⁹⁷ None the less the hierarchical segregation of roles within

⁹⁰ TNA: PRO C 47/40/106: the guild of St John the Baptist at Gedney (Lincolnshire); C 47/38/23: the guild of Holy Trinity, Ely, founded in 1369.

⁹¹ TNA: PRO C 47/40/146.

⁹² TNA: PRO C 47/40/109.

⁹³ TNA: PRO C 47/40/142.

⁹⁴ e.g. TNA: PRO C 47/44/337: the guild of the Purification at Upwell (Norfolk), refounded in 1327–8.

⁹⁵ e.g. TNA: PRO C 47/44/337: the guild of Corpus Christi at Oxborough (Norfolk), founded in 1360 (the place is not named in the return, which, however, was evidently preserved with others from Oxborough and was consequently thus catalogued at the Public Record Office). At the feast each member gave a $\frac{1}{2}d.$ loaf toward the alms of the fraternity.

⁹⁶ Macy, *Theologies of the Eucharist*.

⁹⁷ John Bossy, 'The mass as a social institution, 1200–1700', *Past and Present*, 100 (1983), 29–61.

the mass, as this crystallized from the twelfth century, seems likely to have encouraged the development of the guild feast along the quasi-liturgical yet essentially non-hierarchical lines which have been indicated above.

NETWORKING

The perceived benefits of the fraternity dinner in the spheres of personal standing and self-esteem were directly related to the way in which this ritualized occasion legitimized and articulated the formation of new social relationships. It has been suggested above that the formation of guilds was in part a response to the experience of social change and an acknowledged need for an environment in which new links of solidarity and patronage could be forged.⁹⁸ The fraternity feast appears, from the details which have survived, to have played a crucial part in this process. The common meal was social politics in action.

The first feature requiring emphasis is the significant degree of voluntarism which attached to attendance at the feast, as it did also to membership of the community. It is obvious that pressures operated in certain circumstances to impel both enrolment and participation; nevertheless, personal commitment was, as has been seen, a universal constituent of guild ideology, and even when the options were constrained, an individual member would retain a justified and saving sense that he or she was present by choice. Because the ideals of these societies placed an enhanced value on solidarity amongst the membership, fraternity statutes tended to insist in principle on full attendance at the feast on the 'general day'.⁹⁹ These rules were lent practical weight by the officers of the companies, who went through the town or into the hinterland in advance of the event, in order to remind the brethren of their loyalty. The Nottingham fraternity of St George reimbursed its agent the cost of shoeing his horse when he went about to notify the brothers and sisters of the impending feast in 1481.¹⁰⁰ The Holy Cross guild of Stratford-upon-Avon similarly allowed expenses to officers riding into the country and to towns including Warwick and Coventry to announce the feast—for the majority of

⁹⁸ See pp. 6–7.

⁹⁹ It was a very unusual guild which automatically expelled from the society one who failed to appear at the dinner: TNA: PRO C 4741/193: the guild of St Augustine in the church of St Augustine by Paul's Gate, London, founded in 1387. Far more common was the simple requirement of a good excuse. A sick absentee might sometimes receive food or drink from the feast at home, e.g. TNA: PRO C 47/43/261: the guild of St Margaret, Lynn, founded in 1354; C 47/44/325: the guild of All Saints, Stoke Ferry (Norfolk), founded in 1359.

¹⁰⁰ *The Guilds of St. George and of St. Mary of the Church of St. Peter, Nottingham*, Thoroton Society Record Series, extra series, 7 (1939), *sub anno*.

its members lived out of the town.¹⁰¹ In a copy of the ordinances of the same guild made in 1443,

It is ordained that the procurators shall warn all brothers and sisters that on the day of the feast, before the time of the high mass, they should be at the master's house and fetch him to church, the priests of the guild meeting him at the cross at the chapel door with their cross and banner, and in their surplices and copes if the weather will shape.¹⁰²

Yet the decision to attend was ultimately, and crucially, a matter of personal choice. The moral purpose of the event depended upon the desire of its participants to be present.

Where figures of attendance at particular feasts can be obtained, the numbers fell short of a full complement, but were still substantial. Moreover, patterns of participation at the individual level suggest the operation of conscious strategies in the use of the occasion. A higher proportional attendance was undoubtedly characteristic of relatively smaller, more localized guilds.¹⁰³ But even a medium-sized fraternity like that of Our Lady's Nativity at Wymondham in Norfolk, which comprised around a hundred members in the early sixteenth century, mustered no fewer than eighty-four of these in 1534.¹⁰⁴ The annual feast of the larger guild of the Holy Cross at Stratford-upon-Avon was attended in the early fifteenth century by between two- and three-fifths of its total membership: of a potential tally of around 250, the quantity of feasters, male and female, was 133 in 1409, 108 in 1411, 160 in 1413.¹⁰⁵ Still greater gatherings were evidently customary at the hall of the Luton guild of Holy Trinity in the early sixteenth century, for this society not

¹⁰¹ Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, MS BRT 1/3/4 (1388–9, expenses 'to John Regnalt going to Warwick to invite the brothers to the feast'), 1/3/105 (1495–6, expenses 'of Master John Davye and Thomas . . . at Coventry, warning the brothers and sisters of Coventry to the feast . . . John Barber to Bromesgrove, and Thomas Green to the town of Knowle for the same purpose'). For some general comments on the distribution of the membership, as indicated by the register of admissions between the early 15th and the early 16th century, see *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross . . . Stratford-upon-Avon*, 16–26; and pp. 114–15 in the present study.

¹⁰² Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, MS BRT 1/1, fol. 1; printed in *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross . . . Stratford-upon-Avon*, 36–7.

¹⁰³ The case cited in n. 99 of expulsion for non-attendance certainly concerned a relatively small society.

¹⁰⁴ This guild included eighty-four living members in 1475–6; its average annual recruitment over the following half-century was about five. Wymondham, parish church, MS accounts of the guild of St Mary's Nativity, 1475–1536, fols. 2–3, 31–31^v. In 1529 it was determined that every brother and sister present at the dinner should contribute 1*d.* towards the alms of the guild; in 1534 7*s.*, or 84*d.*, was collected on this occasion. MS accounts, fols 55^v, 61^v.

¹⁰⁵ Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, MS BRT 1/3/23, 1/3/25, 1/3/27. In 1410–11, an annual payment from every member of 7*d.* in 'light-silver' was discontinued, all the existing brothers and sisters being asked to compound for the levy with a single payment of 10*d.* On this occasion 245 members were listed. BRT 1/3/25, and for the previous rate of the 'light-silver' see BRT 1/3/14.

only kept 156 pewter plates, a further 576 wooden plates, and 360 spoons in stock, but additionally hired on occasion a supplementary service of 240 pewter dishes.¹⁰⁶ The inventory of the prestigious Coventry guild of the same dedication in 1441 listed impressive quantities of tableware: twenty sets of pewter, comprising in every case a dozen each of platters, dishes, and saucers; and in addition a further 264 platters and the same number of dishes, in this case perhaps of a humbler material such as tin.¹⁰⁷ The other principal Coventry guild, that of Corpus Christi, whose membership ran to several hundreds, was unusual in holding two, and at one stage no fewer than three, annual dinners. Around 1500 the 'Lenten' and 'venison' feasts (held, respectively, on the Wednesday before Palm Sunday and in October or November) were each attended by about 150 to 200 of the society. In this instance the fraternity records reveal the names of those present, and it is consequently possible to observe the choices made, often over a long period of membership of the guild.¹⁰⁸ Amongst a body marked by considerable social diversity, the most frequent attenders were local tradespeople. Robert Swyft, a draper, joined the Corpus Christi guild in 1488, and between that year and 1499, he attended nineteen of the annual Lent and venison dinners, missing only five of these occasions. A humbler artisan, the cardmaker William Naydon, inscribed his name in 1490, and in the ensuing period of his membership was present at twenty-one of a possible total of thirty dinners. A baker, Thomas Gupshull, dined twenty-one times during three decades of involvement with the guild from 1495. Such examples could be multiplied ad infinitum. By contrast, members from farther afield such as London merchants, and the social elite, including regional gentry and aristocracy, were less frequent presences. Sir Maurice and Lady Isabel Berkeley and Sir Ralph Shirley all joined the guild at the Lent dinner in 1514; having once graced the occasion, they never returned. However, they retained, and may have valued, the right to do so: another knight, Thomas Lucy, who was enrolled at the venison feast in 1512, attended the dinner again nine years later, in 1521. While the Coventry guild of Corpus Christi was, like any fraternity, unique, these details nevertheless help to illuminate the wider picture. It is clear that the commensality of the fraternity dinner was not merely an enforced conformity. Nor was it the unthinking repetition of a timeless tradition. The pattern of attendance, in this one case, underlines that the feasts happened because they retained a perceived relevance to the particular and evolving circumstances of their participants.

¹⁰⁶ Bedford, Bedfordshire County Record Office, MS Z 486/1, Register of the guild of Holy Trinity, Luton, *sub annis* 1526–7, 1528–9.

¹⁰⁷ *The Records of the Guild of the Holy Trinity . . . of Coventry*, 151.

¹⁰⁸ Coventry, City Record Office, MS A 6, Register of the guild of Corpus Christi and St Nicholas of Coventry, 1488–1553. The third ('goose') dinner, held in July, was less well attended than the other two, and was discontinued in 1495. An edition of this register for the Dugdale Society is in course of preparation by Anthony Divett.

PEACE-MAKING

That relevance had frequently to do with the working out of new social relationships. The language and gestures of mutual trust whereby the occasions were articulated were the potential basis for new and firmer footings in political and economic relations: a creditor reassured, a customer or an employer secured, a vote or a voice of support guaranteed, a feud at least temporarily resolved. There need be no doubt that such were, on occasion, the successful achievements of a fraternity banquet. Yet an element of risk was built into the process. The strenuous emphasis of fraternity statutes on the preservation of peace at the dinner is itself a reminder of the potential for conflict inherent in the assembly. Countless rules allude ominously to the possibility of arguments arising and to the dangers of clamour and discord. Critical outsiders tended to attribute the occasional violence of guild feasts to the drink alone. But without underestimating the contribution to the dangers of the occasion of sometimes heroic quantities of ale and wine, participants knew that the potential for conflict was incorporated within the very structure of this communal event. The concentration in one place of a more-or-less diverse company already courted a risk of discord. But beyond this, the feast was a recognized occasion for peace-making. The guild dinner exemplified a practice common to many cultures, of using a formal communal meal as an occasion for the reconciliation of differences. The very language of unity and peace which announced the event contained within itself the implied expectation of tension and disharmony. The suspension of everyday distinctions within the context of the meal shared between 'brothers' and 'sisters' created a possible common ground for discussion and mutual acceptance, and yet a peaceful outcome could not be guaranteed.

The perceived importance of this goal of reconciliation is implicit in the long sequence of regulations about behaviour in the fraternity dining hall. In the eleventh century, the guild at Abbotsbury in Dorset provided that

The guild-brother who insults another deliberately inside the guild is to make amends to the whole fellowship with his entrance fee, and afterwards to the man whom he insulted, just as he can arrange it. And if he will not submit to compensation, he is to forfeit the fellowship and every other guild-privilege. And he who brings in more men than he ought without the permission of the steward and of the purveyors is to pay his entrance fee.¹⁰⁹

In the fourteenth-century guild of St Edmund in Bishop's Lynn,

If any brother or sister maliciously or despitefully belie their brother or their sister out of malignance, in the presence of the alderman and of their guild brethren, he

¹⁰⁹ *English Historical Documents*, i, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, 2nd edn (London, 1996), 660–2.

or she shall pay 6*d.* for the fine of the guild . . . And whoever makes any noise in the time of the drinking, or during the holding of a morrow-speech, when the dean asks him to be quiet, and he will not, shall be made to hold the rod [*sc.* as a sign of justice], and if he refuses then he shall pay 3*d.* for the fine of the guild or lose the fraternity of the guild for evermore, unless he is given grace.¹¹⁰

The rules of a guild at Watlington in Norfolk, composed in the 1380s, that the conversation at the feast should be ‘all of peace and love’, and that any quarrel which had arisen during the previous twelve months should on this occasion be settled, were not bland pieties but the recognition of tensions, and serious instructions to participants to make the best use of the potential of the occasion for forgiveness and reconciliation.¹¹¹ The social mix of an urban fraternity like that of St Thomas Becket at Oxford, which in the late Middle Ages brought together members of both ‘town’ and ‘gown’ communities, invested communal meals with a particular significance in a city conspicuously lacking in any transcendent institution otherwise capable of fostering dialogue between these mutually antagonistic interests.¹¹²

‘LOVE BRETHREN’

The guild’s active potential to construct new alliances was evinced also in the deliberate recruitment of particular personal connections. The fraternity of a craft might cultivate a special category of ‘love brethren’: practitioners of other crafts, whose friendship was thus, for a variety of possible reasons, deliberately fostered.¹¹³ In the case of the tailors of London, the non-tailor membership of the craft fraternity of St John the Baptist was known as the ‘out brothers’. Across the first half of the fifteenth century the latter group numbered as many as a thousand, double the total of craft professionals recruited to the guild in the same period.¹¹⁴ It was also common for associations of shopkeepers to solicit aristocratic or ecclesiastical patronage and protection in the same way. Their evident success in this endeavour suggests that the lords themselves perceived the fraternity gathering to be a potentially valuable entrée to the world of urban politics. The advantage, in terms of clientage, could be mutual. The Ludlow palmers’ guild regularly invited particular ‘outsiders and gentry’ (*extraneos et generosos*) to its dinners, freely giving livery hoods of the society

¹¹⁰ TNA: PRO C 47/42/247; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 94–5.

¹¹¹ TNA: PRO C 47/44/348.

¹¹² Carl I. Hammer, ‘The town–gown confraternity of St. Thomas the Martyr in Oxford’, *Mediaeval Studies*, 39 (1977), 466–76.

¹¹³ See further Chapter 5.

¹¹⁴ Davies and Saunders, *Merchant Taylors’ Company*, 20–2.

to these prestigious figures or to their retainers (who were the more likely occasionally to wear them).¹¹⁵ The Holy Cross guild of Stratford-upon-Avon was sought by many of the Warwickshire gentry, who evidently found its dinners a diplomatic context for meeting one another in addition to smoothing relations with commercial suppliers and urban interests.¹¹⁶ The Maidstone guild of the same dedication sent repeatedly to discover whether the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Bouchier, would accept an invitation to its feast.¹¹⁷ In general, lords, like those encountered earlier in a Coventry instance, evidently did not feel it incumbent on them to attend in person on more than rare occasions. But even when absent, many perceived the guild networks to be so far worth cultivating as to dispatch gifts of venison for the dinner or else to loan their minstrels for the entertainment.¹¹⁸ By contrast with the close and horizontal links between the majority of the membership, such remoter affiliations exemplify the kind of weak ties which could, on occasion, pay strong dividends.¹¹⁹ The protection of the powerful might at any time prove invaluable, as it did in many instances during the suppression of the guilds in the 1540s.¹²⁰ In the articulation of relations between artisans and their craft associates, between tradesmen and the gentry, and between town and countryside, the fraternity feast was a crucial place of encounter and exchange.

CONCLUSION

The feast of the guild brought the members together in the name of an ideal which was larger than could be compassed by any individual, and greater, too, than the scope of the society itself. The sense of contributing to the construction of an admirable image of the community of local inhabitants, including

¹¹⁵ Shrewsbury, Shropshire County Record Office, MS 356/321, Accounts of the wardens of the palmers' guild, late 14th to early 16th century; MS 356/323, Lists of new members of the guild, 1504–5.

¹¹⁶ Christine Carpenter, 'Town and "country": the Stratford guild and political networks of fifteenth-century Warwickshire', in Robert Bearman, ed., *The History of an English Borough: Stratford-upon-Avon, 1196–1996* (Stroud, 1997), 62–79.

¹¹⁷ Maidstone, Kent Archives Office, MS Md. G1–2 (the invitation was issued in 1474; in the following year Bouchier was inscribed as a member of the guild).

¹¹⁸ The Maidstone records cited in the previous note contain examples of these practices.

¹¹⁹ See Mark Granovetter, 'The strength of weak ties', *American Journal of Sociology*, 78 (1973), 1360–80; Granovetter, 'The strength of weak ties: a network theory revisited', in Peter V. Marsden and Nan Lin, eds, *Social Structures and Network Analysis* (Beverly Hills, CA, 1982), 105–30. The concept of 'weak ties' is helpful in this context, but it is not necessary to adopt Granovetter's binary distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' connections: the historical reality was a graded spectrum of connections.

¹²⁰ See p. 5 in the present study.

both the fraternity itself and the neighbours whom it touched, as enlightened and virtuous was a powerful draw to recruits. Once enrolled and present together with the other members, the individual accepted the risk of a partial discomposure of his or her familiar self. Invited to embrace their neighbours, the sisters and brothers put down their particular, protective defences and exposed themselves to the danger of an infusion of the collective values of the community. As was discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the very survival of the individual depends upon the ability to open up to others and to incorporate within him- or herself the elements of a shared moral perspective, even as, in order to preserve the integrity of the person, it was also important to limit that exposure. Both the symbolism of the festival and the bodily ways in which it was performed were designed to include the individual member as an integral part of a harmonious and a greater whole.



Fig. 6 Merchant Adventurers' Hall, York. Built in 1357–61 for the fraternity of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. Used from 1430 by the mercers. View of main hall interior towards the dais end. Photo: Kate Giles.

Trust

Trust is rare, for many men speak many things.

Cato (medieval schoolbook)¹

CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In the exceptionally unstable world of late-medieval Europe, in which the support networks of family and neighbours were repeatedly strained to breaking-point, the survival of the individual depended upon the creation of relationships of trust. Guilds were founded in large numbers and diverse forms for this very purpose. To insist upon the relevance of voluntary associations and mutual support in the increasingly complex and fragmented social conditions of the last medieval centuries may appear contradictory or irrelevant to what some historians have seen as the emergence, out of precisely this context of social change, of a new type of person: autonomous, individualistic, and competitive. The nineteenth-century Romantic critique of modernity, which it accused of dissolving society into alienated and increasingly isolated individuals, has continued to inflect more recent and scholarly historical accounts. Whereas some in the nineteenth century idealized the medieval period in general as an imagined golden age of economic simplicity and social harmony, research on the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries now shows a far more complicated and shifting picture. One result of this discovery has been simply to push back the chronology of the advent of features associated with modernity, including the dominant self-interest of the economically competitive individual. Since the publication in 1978 of Alan Macfarlane's *The Origins*

¹ *Disticha Catonis*, lxiii.2, ed. Marcus Boas (Amsterdam, 1952), 46. 'Cato', of uncertain authorship but erroneously attributed by medieval readers to either Cato the Elder or Cato the Younger, was the most popular schoolbook of the western Middle Ages. This phrase is cited in a late-medieval guide for preachers: *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook*, ed. S. Wenzel (University Park, PA, 1989), 171.

of *English Individualism*, many studies both on late-medieval England and on other parts of Europe have borne out Macfarlane's claim to identify in that period evidence of personal striving and competition in the market-place, even at the social level of the peasantry.² The individual peasant or artisan who, seizing the opportunities for investment which opened up in the context of demographic crisis after the mid-fourteenth century and achieving material advancement and social status at the expense of his neighbours, has been described as a proto-capitalist entrepreneur.³ A case has been made that the entrepreneurial activities of some upwardly mobile representatives of a new 'middling sort' in the fifteenth century were informed by an individualistic 'work ethic': while not all were 'strongly motivated by the new impulses of the age', it is said that 'some peasants and wage-earners worked hard in order to consume and to advance themselves'.⁴ While it is hard to be certain of these precise motives, a convincing body of evidence supports the idea that the late-medieval market economy was indeed competitive, and that it subjected the traditional relationships of kin and neighbourhood to enormous pressure.⁵ However, the model of 'proto-capitalism' needs careful handling, if a distorting teleology is to be avoided. This late-medieval world, with both its ambitious and its vulnerable individuals, was at the same time no less characterized by multiple forms of association. Our model of this society needs to take account of that double aspect.

Already at the end of the nineteenth century, Émile Durkheim had understood the necessary interrelationship between individualism and solidarity in the context of modernity, thereby turning the Romantic idea on its head. So far from being a distinguishing feature of simple societies, Durkheim understood voluntary communal association to be more urgently required by the complexity and fragmentation of a society in an advanced stage of development, in which the family, adequate as it was in a purely agrarian environment, no longer sufficed to provide the necessary framework of ethics and law.

² The literature is vast, but e.g. J. Day, *The Medieval Market Economy* (Oxford, 1987); R. H. Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society 1000–1500* (Cambridge, 1993); R. Grassby, *The Idea of Capitalism before the Industrial Revolution* (Lanham, MD, 1999); Maarten Prak, 'Early modern capitalism: an introduction', in Maarten Prak, ed., *Early Modern Capitalism: Economic and Social Change in Europe, 1400–1800* (London, 2001), 1–21.

³ Christopher Dyer, 'Were there any capitalists in fifteenth-century England?', in his *Everyday Life in Medieval England* (London, 1994), 305–27; Dyer, 'The consumer and the market in the later Middle Ages', in *Everyday Life*, 257–81; Dyer, *A Country Merchant, 1495–1520: Trading and Farming at the End of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2012).

⁴ Christopher Dyer, 'Work ethics in the fourteenth century', in James Bothwell, P. J. P. Goldberg and W. M. Ormrod, eds, *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England* (York, 2000), 21–41.

⁵ A survey and further discussion in Gervase Rosser, 'The quality of life', in Ralph Griffiths, ed., *The Short Oxford History of the British Isles: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 2003), 31–57.

Why does the individual, while becoming more autonomous, depend more upon society? How can he be at once more individual and more solidary? Certainly, these two movements, contradictory as they appear, develop in parallel fashion.⁶

This paradox, on which Durkheim built one of the foundational texts of modern sociology, was well exemplified by the society of later medieval Europe, in which the human challenges consequent upon the mobility of the workforce were felt to a peculiarly intense degree. If the medieval places in question here bear some comparison with the cities with which Durkheim was familiar in late nineteenth-century Europe, at least in respect of the diversity and mobility of their populations, on the other hand there was a difference between the historical periods which is especially pertinent to understanding of the guilds. Largely absent from the late-medieval cities were the legal contracts and systems of public accountability which, in the later period, began to offer at least a minimal degree of personal protection and insurance for urban populations. Without any such guarantees, the medieval labourer or artisan was heavily dependent, for the construction of necessary working relationships, upon the creation of trust. In fact, in many societies where legal controls are weak or absent, a heavy reliance is placed upon trust. Even the institution of legal rights in more recent times has not removed the need for trusting relationships. Indeed, regulated accountability, so far from being an adequate substitute, can have the effect of undermining trust.⁷ Trust has not been outdated, and its history may still have the potential to inform understanding of the present. Today as in the past, trust is regularly treated as a material resource, even against the odds.⁸ In late-medieval Europe, trust was a vital commodity. Yet by the same token, it was also perceived to be hard to find, above all in the treacherous world of the towns.⁹ In order to function, it required some basis in social and ethical realities. A widely employed means to establish these foundations was to form and to participate in guilds.

CRAFTS AND OTHER ASSOCIATIONS

The concern of this chapter is with the strategic use by late-medieval workers of different kinds of guild as potential means to negotiate their integration into

⁶ Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* [1893], transl. George Simpson (New York, 1933), 37.

⁷ Onora O'Neill, *A Question of Trust* (Cambridge, 2002).

⁸ Diego Gambetta, 'Can we trust trust?', in Diego Gambetta, ed., *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (Oxford, 1988), 213–37; Ernest Gellner, 'Trust, cohesion, and the social order', in Gambetta, ed., *Trust*, 142–57.

⁹ Gervase Rosser with Patricia Dennison, 'Urban culture and the Church, 1300–1540', in David Palliser, ed., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, i, 600–1540 (Cambridge, 2000), 335–69, at pp. 368–9.

variously advantageous social groups. To consider the history of work in this way is to take a broad view of economic history. Recent debate surrounding the trade organizations known to economic historians as ‘merchant guilds’ and ‘craft guilds’ has been partially vitiated by its restriction of focus.¹⁰ In a perspective which places these institutions within a spectrum that also included diverse other forms of association, the question whether official organizations of leading merchants or craftsmen played a progressive or a conservative part in the development of the European economy appears too narrowly conceived. A contribution to that continuing debate may be made by problematizing the conceptual category of ‘the guild’ which has been employed by economic historians. The argument to be presented here is that, within parameters determined by political hierarchy and cultural norms, a diversity of associational strategies was open to the late-medieval worker, which created a limited yet significant scope for agency at the personal level, and the possibility of adjustment and adaptation in the organization of industry.¹¹

As previous chapters have indicated, ‘the guild’ was not a stable institutional type, but was a variable and more or less heterogeneous grouping which could provide a legitimizing frame for diverse activities. From perhaps as early as the ninth century, European merchant elites, by forming particular and powerful interest groups sometimes known to themselves and more often to modern scholarship as ‘merchant guilds’, preserved their own economic and political advantage at the expense of the vast majority whom they deliberately excluded from their societies.¹² The self-serving interests of these potent financial institutions were an undeniable force in the medieval economy; but beyond the fact that the category of ‘merchant guilds’ is itself a nebulous and varied one, neither at the micro nor the macro level can the economic history of the period be fully explained by their presence. Until very recently, on the other hand, historical studies on the organization of industrial labour in the Middle Ages have been overwhelmingly concerned with the bodies of master craftsmen, commonly described in the medieval sources as *crafts*, *Zünfte*, *métiers*, or *arti*, and referred to, somewhat confusingly, by many Anglophone scholars as

¹⁰ B. Gustafsson, ‘The rise and economic behaviour of medieval craft guilds: an economic-theoretical interpretation’, *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 35 (1987), 1–40; S. R. Epstein, ‘Craft guilds, apprenticeship, and technological change in pre-industrial Europe’ [1998], repr. in S. R. Epstein and Maarten Prak, eds, *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2008), 52–80; Sheilagh Ogilvie, ‘“Whatever is, is right”? Economic institutions in pre-industrial Europe’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 60 (2007), 649–84; Ogilvie, *Can We Rehabilitate the Guilds? A Sceptical Reappraisal* (Cambridge, 2007); debate between S. R. Epstein and Sheilagh Ogilvie in *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 61 (2008), 155–82.

¹¹ This argument was initially and partially developed in Gervase Rosser, ‘Crafts, guilds and the negotiation of work in the medieval town’, *Past and Present*, 154 (1997), 3–31.

¹² These are the bodies principally subjected to critical review in Sheilagh Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000–1800* (Cambridge, 2011).

'craft guilds'.¹³ The extensively recorded statutes of these formal craft organizations convey a misleading impression of coherence and comprehensiveness. In addition, the same regulations express a concern both for the well-being of workers and for the quality of their products which students of labour since the nineteenth century have been prone to cite as proof either of enlightenment or of self-seeking hypocrisy on the part of the master craftsmen, according to political taste.¹⁴ Often criticized in more recent centuries for their real and perceived inequity and conservatism (to cite only a single, highly significant instance: their general exclusion of women, despite women's major contribution to the workforce), the crafts of late-medieval and early-modern Europe have recently been subject to a significant reassessment, which, while not vindicating them against all charges, has complicated the impression of their role.¹⁵ Yet their nature and behaviour are still not fully understood. The perception that the official craft institutions tended to operate as monopolies of independent masters has led some scholars to identify the dependent journeymen, by contrast, as a proto-proletariat of hired labour.¹⁶ The idea that work in medieval cities was characterized by a developing polarization between these two groups, masters and journeymen, has for over a century provided the prevalent framework of historical debate.¹⁷ One may question, however, whether this conceptual structure has been entirely helpful. That late-medieval European cities occasionally witnessed clashes between bodies of workers who chose to identify themselves in these terms is certain, yet historians should be wary of accepting the rhetoric of particular disputes as an

¹³ For a note on the origin of the unhistorical, hybrid, and misleading term, 'craft guilds', see S. L. Thrupp, 'Medieval guilds reconsidered', *Journal of Economic History*, 2 (1943), 164–73, at p. 165 n. 1.

¹⁴ See the historiographical reviews by O. G. Oexle, 'Die mittelalterliche Zunft als Forschungsproblem', *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, 118 (1982), 1–44; Roberto Greci, 'Un ambiguo patrimonio di studio tra polemiche, inerzie e prospettive', in his *Corporazioni e mondo del lavoro nell'Italia padana medievale* (Bologna, 1988), 11–43; Enrico Artifani, 'Forme del potere e organizzazione corporativa in età comunale: un percorso storiografico', in C. Mozzarelli, ed., *Economia e corporazioni: il governo degli interessi nella storia d'Italia dal medioevo all'età contemporanea* (Milan, 1988), 9–40; Susan Reynolds, 'The writing of medieval urban history in England', *Theoretische Geschichte*, 19 (1992), repr. in her *Ideas and Solidarities of the Medieval Laity* (Aldershot, 1995), ch. XV, at pp. 53–4.

¹⁵ Most notably, Jean-Pierre Sosson, ed., *Les métiers au Moyen Âge* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1994); Ian Anders Gadd and Patrick Wallis, eds, *Guilds, Society and Economy in London 1450–1800* (London, 2002); Maarten Prak, Catharina Lis, Jan Lucassen, and Hugo Soly, eds, *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power, and Representation* (Aldershot, 2006); Epstein and Prak, eds, *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy*; Gadd and Wallis, eds, *Guilds and Association in Europe, 900–1900* (London, 2006).

¹⁶ See Wilfried Reininghaus, *Die Entstehung der Gesellengilden im Spätmittelalter* (Wiesbaden, 1981), 3–23.

¹⁷ See, for example, the references cited in n. 10; Reininghaus, *Die Entstehung*, 68, 237, and *passim*; R. H. Hilton, 'Status and class in the medieval town', in T. R. Slater and Gervase Rosser, eds, *The Church in the Medieval Town* (Leicester, 1998), 9–19, for this assumption.

explanatory model for labour relations at large. It is reasonable to suppose that this rhetoric derived its force from its resonance with the actual experience of contemporaries, who from time to time were demonstrably moved to action by a sense of class antagonism. However, 'masters' and 'journeymen' continued throughout the medieval period to be heterogeneous groups with shifting and partially overlapping interests. Many peasants and artisans who rose to relative prosperity started out as servants, as also, in turn, did their own children.¹⁸ The formerly received view which identified masters as entrepreneurial owners of capital and journeymen as a nascent working class is undercut by so many local varieties of experience that the bipolar class model remains an insufficiently sharp historical tool. This is the less remarkable when it is remembered that the reification both of capitalistic enterprise and of the generalized kindred of journeymen (*Gesellenverband*) in question here is itself of recent, nineteenth-century origin.¹⁹ The traditional categories of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical discourse are not wholly erroneous. But the apparent clarity of their definition has left the more complex experience of the majority of medieval urban workers out of focus. To emphasize the degree of openness and lack of rigid structure in this society is by no means to idealize the scope it offered for individual choice, but rather to underline the vital necessity, as the means to survival in the late-medieval environment, of the construction of mutually supportive human relationships.

In attempting to recover the *réalité vécue* of working townspeople in the Middle Ages, a number of recent historians have acknowledged that the statutes promulgated by formally constituted crafts were normative or idealistic, rather than reliable descriptions of practice, and have called for research that measures the gap between the two.²⁰ It has been correctly pointed out that much work in the medieval town took place beyond the direct control of the official trade institutions, whose ordinances cannot, therefore, alone describe urban labour in its totality. This *aperçu* has begun to stimulate descriptive reconstructions of the details of working practice at particular times and places.²¹ At the same time, an additional line of criticism, adumbrated in the older literature, has been given a fresh emphasis in the English historiography of medieval crafts. This is the claim that the organized trades, so far from

¹⁸ Dyer, 'Work ethics', 35.

¹⁹ Reininghaus, *Die Entstehung*, 71–3.

²⁰ Most notably, Jean-Pierre Sosson, 'Die Körperschaften in den Niederlanden und Nordfrankreich: neue Forschungsperspektiven', in K. Friedland, ed., *Gilde und Korporationen in den nordeuropäischen Städten des späten Mittelalters* (Cologne, 1984), 79–90; Sosson, 'Les métiers: norme et réalité: l'exemple des anciens Pays-Bas méridionaux aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles', in J. Hamesse and C. Muraille, eds, *Le travail au Moyen Âge* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1990), 339–48; Sosson, 'La recherche en Europe atlantique', in A.-M. Dubler, ed., *Handwerksgeschichte—Histoire de l'artisanat* (Geneva, 1993), 32–42. For England, see Heather Swanson, 'The illusion of economic structure: craft guilds in late medieval English towns', *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), 29–48.

²¹ See the references cited in n. 15.

evolving out of the workplace, with a consequently perceived relevance to the practices of their respective industries and to the lives of their members, were rather imposed from above, as a means of authoritarian control over those who were compelled by statute to belong. What has been called 'the system of craft guilds imposed on artisans' allegedly comprised 'executive instruments' or 'agencies of urban government': a form of 'industrial police' with powers to enforce compliance with a wide range of social norms—sobriety, deference towards elders, and so on—determined by the elite. The somewhat paradoxical thrust of this thesis is that, while the formal crafts had no more than a secondary and partial impact upon the practical operation of trades and manufactures, they formed part of a broader political system which firmly regulated the lives of working people.²² This argument has greatly underestimated the internal vitality of the craft organizations, which it is no less legitimate to see as potential resources, created and utilized at will by their members. It has been the more easy to undervalue the craft organizations in this way, in so far as they have been viewed in isolation from a range of alternative and complementary strategies for the arrangement of labour relations, with which the official institutions interacted.²³

CREDIT RELATIONS

The diversity of relationships into which any individual was required to enter called for the constant renewal of a basis of mutual trust. Implicit in any act of economic trust is a reciprocal judgement about the moral character of the individuals involved. No one in the late Middle Ages could avoid such judgements about personality and moral worth, which called for the ability to assess the character and motives of relative strangers with complex identities. A tendency to over-simplification in the older historiography of work relations in the later Middle Ages resulted from the failure to recognize that an individual simultaneously possessed plural identities.²⁴ A 'worker' might be,

²² Heather Swanson, *Medieval Artisans: An Urban Class in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1988), 8; Edward Miller and John Hatcher, *Medieval England: Towns, Commerce and Crafts, 1086–1348* (London, 1995), 368–9 (the authors concede that 'craft guilds, at the same time, were something more than instruments of the municipalities'); Britnell, *Commercialisation of English Society*, 175; R. H. Hilton, 'Towns in English medieval society', repr. in Richard Holt and Gervase Rosser, eds, *The English Medieval Town* (London, 1990), 19–28, at p. 25.

²³ This argument resonates with the notion of the *Zunftlandschaft* advanced in Wilfried Reininghaus, ed., *Zunftlandschaften in Deutschland und den Niederlanden im Vergleich* (Münster, 2000); but in the present discussion the 'landscape' of the guilds is given a more inclusive definition.

²⁴ In relation to debates about class formation, the point is made by W. Reddy, 'The concept of class', in M. L. Bush, ed., *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social*

all at the same time, a mother and household manager, a fully qualified worker of precious stones hired by the day by a monastic office of works, and an entrepreneur of the craft undertaking joint commissions with other masters and engaging journeyman or apprentice labour in her own right.²⁵ Viewed globally, the world of medieval urban work was both internally fractured, generating a need for complex and cross-cutting liaisons between workers, and multifaceted in its encounters with other social spheres, which in turn gave rise to fresh perceptions and aspirations on the part of the individual artisan. Indeed, the very concept of 'the artisan' in modern historiography has tended to be too unitary and too static: the experience of the craftsman or crafts-woman in the Middle Ages was both fragmented and varying over time.²⁶ These qualities of diversity and dynamism, together with the strategies workers deployed in response to them, are illuminated by the evidence of the many associations to which working people subscribed.

A necessary concomitant of these diverse relationships was the ubiquity, throughout the late-medieval economy, of financial credit. Recent scholarship has revised an older view, which assumed indebtedness to be, except in the case of wealthy entrepreneurs, a sign of economic failure and social decline. Without denying the reality of enslavement to debt, it has also been shown that the credit relationships which penetrated both the towns and the villages of later medieval Europe were more broadly a sign of the flexibility and adaptability of both peasants and townspeople in the face of successive demographic and economic crises.²⁷ The mechanisms which supported

Stratification (London, 1992), 13–25. That multiple identities generated cross-cutting loyalties, which in turn tended to subvert the development of dualistic social conflicts, was also a finding of the anthropologist Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Oxford, 1965), 107–16. See also Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory* (Oxford, 1995), 44–5, for the related point that there is a strand of social theory which has tended erroneously to assume that human personality was simpler in earlier times.

²⁵ For female (in addition to male) members of the Parisian company of cutters of precious stones in the 14th century, see R. de Lespinasse, *Les métiers et corporations de la ville de Paris*, 3 vols (Paris, 1886–97), ii. 86–7.

²⁶ For the general point, see J. Rancière, 'The myth of the artisan: critical reflections on a category of social history', in S. L. Kaplan and C. J. Koepp, eds, *Work in France: Representations, Meaning, Organisation, and Practice* (Ithaca, NY, 1986), 317–34; Geoffrey Crossick, 'Past masters: in search of the artisan in European history', in Geoffrey Crossick, ed., *The Artisan and the European Town* (Aldershot, 1997), 1–40; James Farr, *Artisans in Europe, 1300–1914* (Cambridge, 2000).

²⁷ Chris Briggs, *Credit and Village Society in Fourteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2009); Phillipp Schofield, *Peasant and Community in Medieval England, 1200–1500* (Basingstoke, 2003). Urban credit, the significance of which is evident from the records of civic courts, remains relatively unstudied in detail. But see P. R. Schofield and N. J. Mayhew, eds, *Credit and Debt in Medieval England c.1180–1350* (Oxford, 2002); and Richard Goddard, 'Surviving recession: English borough courts and commercial contraction, 1350–1500', in Richard Goddard, John Langdon, and Miriam Müller, eds, *Survival and Discord in Medieval Society: Essays in Honour of Christopher Dyer* (Turnhout, 2010), 69–87.

financial loans differed between the north and the south of Europe. In southern regions, notaries employing Roman law recorded in written contracts even small-scale credit relationships between rural peasants. By contrast in England, as in other parts of northern Europe, loans below a certain value tended to be made on an oral basis. Local manorial courts or those of the towns were called upon to defend the interests of lenders, as their records extensively attest. But the initial extension of credit, in the absence of a written guarantee, called for the prior establishment of a fundamental level of trust. Membership of a guild offered a qualification of trustworthiness which could have enabled many who belonged to these societies to participate in the diffuse extension of credit in the late-medieval towns and countryside.

Guilds commonly operated their own credit arrangements, providing loans to members at little or no interest. Some reported that they were doing this already in the fourteenth century, such as the fraternity of St Catherine in the church of St Botolph, Aldersgate in London. The standard annual subscription to this guild was 2s., which made it accessible to most artisans.

If case falleth that any of the brotherhood have need for to borrow a certain of silver [*sum of money*], they should go to the keepers of the box and take that he hath need, so that the sum be not so much that one may [not] be eased as well as another, and that they leave a sufficient wed [*surety*], or else find sufficient borwes [*guarantors*] of the brotherhood.²⁸

At a higher level of economic prosperity, the guild of the Assumption of the Virgin of the merchants of Coventry, founded in 1340, offered to help any brother or sister in need with a free loan:

If any man or woman of the guild, who has been helpful to the guild according to his means, has, by mishap, and not by any fault of his own, fallen into poverty, the guild shall lend him a sum of money, to trade and make gains with, for one year or two, as they think well, without taking anything for the loan.²⁹

Similarly in the Marian guild at Hull, an impoverished member would be lent ten shillings by the society, to invest as he chose: if he prospered the sum was to be returned, but if after three years he was still struggling, the loan was waived.³⁰ Reporting on its affairs in 1389, the Oxford guild of the Assumption noted that five pounds of the common fund had been delivered to one of the brothers, Roger Chychestre, because he was old and had become so poor that he could hardly live.³¹ In the case of the fraternity of St Thomas of Canterbury

²⁸ The National Archives (TNA): PRO C 47/41/198; printed in Joshua Toulmin Smith and Lucy Toulmin Smith, eds, *English Gilds*, Early English Text Society, original series, 40 (1870), 7–8.

²⁹ TNA: PRO C 47/46/439; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 229.

³⁰ TNA: PRO C 47/46/451; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 156–7. A similar provision (with loans of 20s.) in the Hull guild of Corpus Christi: PRO C 47/46/449.

³¹ TNA: PRO C 47/45/389.

at Lynn, which was begun in 1376, if either a brother or a sister fell on hard times, then

all the brothers and sisters of this guild shall be gathered in fere [*companionship*], and help him [or her] with a portion of their chattels, up[on] their power.³²

To judge from the surviving evidence, the involvement of guilds in credit relationships increased in the later Middle Ages. Village guilds in Cambridgeshire in this period are recorded to have maintained a common chest from which members could borrow money, or else to have hired out livestock which had been given to the fraternity, to create a fund with which to help poorer peasants.³³ The rural guild of Jesus and Corpus Christi at Creting in Suffolk was making regular loans from the mid-1470s out of a 'stock' which was initially about £3 but which, by virtue of an 'increase' or interest charge which appears to have been 10 per cent, rose over the course of the following twenty years to almost £15. The numerous named borrowers, who included both men and women, held for the most part small sums of a few pence.³⁴ In the early sixteenth century, the guild of St John the Baptist in the market town of Swaffham in Norfolk was operating a similar system of loans from 'guild stock' (ranging from 2s. to 10s.) at the same relatively modest rate, for the period, of 10 per cent interest. Borrowers here included both men and women, and do not, in this case, appear to have been required to belong to the guild.³⁵ More substantial guilds could call upon greater resources: in the town of Hadleigh in Suffolk, several guilds in the 1530s made loans of this nature which varied from a few shillings to ten or twelve pounds.³⁶

The pervasive need for credit at all social levels required individuals to be able to demonstrate their trustworthiness in order to be able to participate in the cycle of loans. This financial context helps to explain why the single most pressing earthly concern of every medieval peasant and artisan was the establishment of a good personal reputation. This imperative was further accentuated by the relatively high degree of mobility among the working population, a characteristic which was itself intensified by labour shortages during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Long-distance mobility was especially characteristic among day-labourers and servants, but the households of shop-owning masters also commonly comprised recent urban immigrants anxious to transform themselves from the status of *arrivistes* to that of

³² TNA: PRO C 47/43/271; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 48.

³³ Virginia Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside: Social and Religious Change in Cambridgeshire c.1350–1558* (Woodbridge, 1996), 117–18.

³⁴ TNA: PRO E 135/2/22.

³⁵ Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, MS PD 52/233.

³⁶ Hadleigh, Suffolk, Borough Records, MSS 26/24, 26/26–8, 26/33 (sureties for the repayment of loans granted by the guilds of St Thomas, of St John, and of Jesus).

arrivés.³⁷ The dislocated individual inevitably had an equivocal standing in his or her adopted society. Until good repute, and the trust which depended on this, could be vindicated, it would be impossible to obtain credit—that personal credit without which survival in the urban economy was not to be expected. Few medieval craftsmen and craftswomen owned the raw materials which they worked, these being generally provided on trust either by wholesale suppliers or by customers. Likewise, sales were commonly made on a credit basis, whether to dealers or to private consumers. Faced with this need for credit, medieval townspeople were in a distinctive position. They could not put trust in the legally sanctioned contracts of modern public society, since these did not yet exist; nor, on the other hand, could they rely upon the traditional morality and kin-group support more characteristic of the relatively intimate rural world which they, or their parents, had only recently left behind. Either of these two models might have appeared more solidly dependable, but in their absence, the immigrant artisan turned perforce to the creation of networks of credit among the fellow townspeople who now constituted her or his potential workmates, customers, and employers.³⁸ To be of good repute was a crucial basis for personal establishment in this world. And the most frequently employed means of claiming such status in local society was participation in a guild. The particular value of fraternity membership to the medieval urban worker was that the requirement of small but not insignificant financial subventions, and more particularly the moral conditions stipulated for entry, distinguished participants and endowed them with the vital cachet of respectability. In contrast to the primarily jural responsibilities imposed by non-elective relationships—such as blood-kinship or the official associations of master craftsmen—the voluntary basis of participation in the fictional kinship of a fraternity lent a moral force to the declarations of mutual respect sworn between the brothers and sisters.³⁹ These declarations reinforced high standards of sobriety and Christian charity imposed by fraternity statutes upon all members: ideal qualities which helped to provide a basis for collaboration in the complex environment of work in the medieval town.⁴⁰

³⁷ See esp. Bronisław Geremek, 'Les migrations des compagnons au bas Moyen Âge', *Studia historiae oeconomicae*, 5 (1970), 61–79; Reininghaus, *Die Entstehung*, 46 ff.

³⁸ These distinctions are partially indebted to the analogous argument of Keith Hart, 'Kinship, contract, and trust: the economic organisation of migrants in an African city slum', in Gambetta, ed., *Trust*, 176–93, at p. 189.

³⁹ For the distinction, see Julian Pitt-Rivers, 'The kith and the kin', in Jack Goody, ed., *The Character of Kinship* (Cambridge, 1973), 89–105. See also p. 111 in the present study.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 2.

BEYOND THE MARGINS

Even as they sought ties of fraternity, patronage, or working partnership in the shifting social environment of the medieval town, labouring men and women strove to dissociate themselves from the untrustworthy, permanently marginal: the terminally poor. Every city housed an unknown but certainly large proportion of inhabitants—it may have been as high as one-third, and perhaps even more—who lived at a social level below that of the vulnerable or seasonally unemployed member of a respectable confraternity. Each society defines its own margins, and the tendency of medieval town dwellers with at least basic means was to draw an increasingly firm line which left petty criminals, prostitutes, the handicapped, and the permanently unemployed beyond the pale. In this harshly unglamorous world on the edge—symbolically, it was often concentrated on the urban fringes, in the suburbs—few, if any, forms of association appear to have moderated the grim realities of poverty and disease. Modern writers have sometimes sought, by drawing on the poetry of Villon and the Franciscan tradition, to romanticize this world of the outcast, but the imagined kingdoms of thieves and sororities of prostitutes lack justification from the sources.⁴¹ A guild of the handicapped is heard of at Venice, and the unstable world of the German roads gave birth to fragile and fleeting, temporary alliances between tramping journeymen.⁴² But the overwhelmingly prevalent attitude in this suspect crowd seems to have been one of mutual mistrust. The ‘guilds of poor men’ recorded in a number of towns were clearly formed with the intention of distancing their members, by their respectable association, from the unknown transients whose lack of credentials made them liable to be turned away by householders or moved on by magistrates.⁴³ Apprehension about this gloomy world was, indeed, one of the considerations which gave such weight to the value of guild membership, for those able to produce the requisite small cash subscription and the more substantial moral commitment.

⁴¹ Bronisław Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, transl. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 1987); J. Macek, ‘Die sozialen Randgruppen in den böhmischen Städten in der Jagellonenepoche, 1471–1526’, in S. Burghartz et al., eds, *Spannungen und Widersprüche: Gedenschrift für František Graus* (Sigmaringen, 1992), 191–201; Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York, 1996); Evamaria Engel, *Die deutsche Stadt des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1993), 226; Frank Rexroth, *Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London*, transl. Pamela E. Selwyn (Cambridge, 2007).

⁴² Richard Mackenney, *Tradesmen and Traders: The World of the Guilds in Venice and Europe, c.1250–c.1650* (London, 1987), 48; Ernst Schubert, *Fahrendes Volk im Mittelalter* (Bielefeld, 1995), 36–44.

⁴³ See p. 56 in the present study.

FREE ASSOCIATION

The relationship between the member and the guild was reciprocal. To those who would observe its norms, the fraternity offered support in times of personal hardship, lest the individual should fall below the level of respectability needed to obtain work or advancement in the future. In addition, prayers were universally offered for the soul of each dead member of such a guild. A broad distinction may be drawn between those fraternities whose memberships were defined in relatively narrow terms, and those which had more pluralistic constituencies. The former included those comprising practitioners of a particular trade, or urban immigrants from a common region of origin, such as the clubs of Germanic settlers in London and Florence.⁴⁴ The specialized professional grouping might be useful in the handling of technical issues; and in certain contexts a shared cultural identity as a foreigner was strongly felt. But an enhanced personal standing was also enjoyed by members of the vast majority of fraternities, from which such particular ties were partially or wholly absent.⁴⁵ To the worker seeking allies and patrons in the community at large, those societies whose memberships were relatively diverse provided distinct advantages. In the vital process of building up trust, and with it potential economic opportunities, contacts made outside the individual's immediate professional, socio-economic, or status group would always be at least as important as those within it.

The need to build up multivalent relationships was rooted not only in the facts of immigration, but also in the complex nature of medieval production. The interests of a particular worker might lead to the formation of a variety of attachments quite apart from membership, for some compulsory but for others unattainable, in an official organization of master craftsmen. For too long the statutes of the formalized crafts have been allowed to project in the historiography an excessively simplistic picture of working practice. This has been most evident in discussion of those regions, notably northern Italy and

⁴⁴ Sylvia Thrupp, 'Aliens in and around London in the fifteenth century', in A. E. J. Hollaender and W. Kellaway, eds, *Studies in London History Presented to P. E. Jones* (London, 1969), 251–72, at pp. 263–4; A. Doren, *Le arti fiorentine*, transl. G. B. Klein, 2 vols (Florence, 1940), i. 209.

⁴⁵ Analysis of fraternity membership is generally made difficult or impossible by the lack of surviving detailed registers. For some documented examples of both social and occupational diversity in particular fraternities, see, for Germany, Ludwig Remling, 'Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte des spätmittelalterlichen Bruderschaftswesens in Franken', in P. Johanek, ed., *Einungen und Bruderschaften in der spätmittelalterlichen Stadt* (Cologne, 1993), 149–69, at pp. 160 ff.; for Italy, Mackenney, *Tradesmen and Traders*, 53–6, and C. F. Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1989); for France, Catherine Vincent, 'La confrérie comme structure d'intégration: l'exemple de la Normandie', in *Le mouvement confraternel au Moyen Âge (France, Italie, Suisse)* (Rome, 1987), 111–31. For England, see pp. 114–16 in the present study.

southern France, where the public registration of such codes was common from an early date. The civic notaries of Bologna, Parma, Verona, and Montpellier, who in the thirteenth century drew up magnificent catalogues of ordinances, have beguiled historians, who have only belatedly begun to recognize the need for a new agenda.⁴⁶ By contrast, London, a major metropolis of eighty thousand people by 1300, yet one whose administrative records before that date are almost non-existent, has revealed to recent scholarship the great variety and the improvisatory quality of associations of craftsmen in the city at this period, characteristics which would endure throughout the later Middle Ages in London and, as can be demonstrated, in other cities and towns. Of eighteen London guilds fined by the king in 1179–80 for existing without licences, ‘five were for the support of London Bridge which was then being rebuilt, four were explicitly associated with specialised crafts, one was a guild of pilgrims (*peregrini*), one was devoted to St Lazarus (and so probably also associated with pilgrimage), and one (the guild of Haliwell) perhaps served the residents of a suburb and supported the nunnery there’.⁴⁷ During the thirteenth century a number of references occur to groups of traders in the capital acting together; yet there was also evidence of some resistance at this time, on the part of the London mayors, to the creation of sworn craft organizations.⁴⁸ Similarly in Paris in 1268, the trades were permitted to form fraternities but explicitly forbidden to create crafts bound by oath.⁴⁹ The skinners and tailors of London are among the occupations which made their first collective appearances around the end of the thirteenth century in the form of religious and social fraternities. By the early fourteenth century the city’s rulers had moved to allowing the incorporation of the larger crafts and giving them a role within the urban government, the skinners and tailors among them.⁵⁰ But many of the smaller trades in the late-medieval English capital never bothered to acquire such a public status, nor to register their customs in the municipal court.⁵¹ Such groups could readily create alternative

⁴⁶ See, for example, *I capitolari delle arti veneziane*, ed. G. Monticolo, 3 vols (Rome, 1896–1914), introductory essays to vols i and ii, where the degree of real control from the municipal centre is arguably exaggerated; and A. Gouron, *La réglementation des métiers en Languedoc au Moyen Âge* (Geneva and Paris, 1958), where, again, the legal historian gives excessive credit to the effective power of civic authority.

⁴⁷ Derek Keene, ‘English urban guilds, c.900–1300: the purposes and politics of association’, in Gadd and Wallis, eds, *Guilds and Association*, 3–26, at p. 9.

⁴⁸ Anne Sutton, ‘The silent years of London guild history before 1300: the case of the mercers’, *Historical Research*, 71 (1998), 121–41.

⁴⁹ *Livre des métiers de Étienne Boileau*, ed. R. de Lespinasse and F. Bonnardot (Paris, 1879), pp. cxxxi–cxxxii.

⁵⁰ Pamela Nightingale, ‘Capitalists, crafts and constitutional change in late fourteenth-century London’, *Past and Present*, 124 (1989), 3–35.

⁵¹ Elspeth Veale, ‘The “Great Twelve”: mystery and fraternity in thirteenth-century London’, *Historical Research*, 64 (1991), 237–63; Veale, ‘Craftsmen in the economy of London in the fourteenth century’ [1969], repr. in Holt and Rosser, eds, *English Medieval Town*, 120–40. For

structures for meetings and association through the foundation or adaptation of fraternities.⁵² Thus in the fifteenth century the London poulterers took over a pre-existing fraternity of Corpus Christi in their local church of St Mildred Poultry.⁵³ Such patterns may readily be documented elsewhere. In the southern French town of Cordes (Tarn), the curriers had a fraternity of St Blaise by 1371, but no formally registered customs until 1481, when the previous absence of published rules was explicitly mentioned.⁵⁴ Similarly, the shearers of Troyes received their first officially recognized professional statutes in 1510 and were simultaneously granted licence to continue their 'ancient' fraternity.⁵⁵ An oath of mutual support could have force for its swearers without being written down—the journeymen metalworkers of Frankfurt swore together in 1402, but did not bother to have their pledge copied in writing until 1417—and such a club as the *fridlicher eynung* of the Freiburg furriers, which they acknowledged in 1468, seems also to have been bound by oral ties.⁵⁶ The variety and degree of voluntarism of association among working people, once noticed, is striking. Municipal authorities, who had an inevitable concern with food supplies and public order, were led to legislate on prices, hygiene, and military security.⁵⁷ These perennial preoccupations were reinforced in the later medieval period, when threats of artisanal insubordination arising from labour shortages prompted tighter controls on the crafts. Such pressures explain the decisions of numerous associations, including those just mentioned, to have their prescriptive codes set down in written statutes. Nevertheless, the day-to-day practice of industry remained largely outside the interest of urban governments. To a greater extent than has often been assumed, civic magistrates, apart from providing in their courts a forum for arbitration in disputes which the crafts were unable to settle for themselves, tended to leave craftsmen and-women to their own devices.

the population of London c.1300, see Derek Keene, 'Medieval London and its region', *London Journal*, 14 (1989), pp. 99–111; B. M. S. Campbell et al., *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply: Agrarian Production and Distribution in the London Region, c.1300* (London, 1993), 43–5. At Norwich, the girdlers appear first in the records, before 1200, as a fraternity. *Records of the Borough of Norwich*, ed. W. Hudson and J. C. Tingey, 2 vols (Norwich, 1906–10), ii, 15.

⁵² See also Gervase Rosser, 'Workers' associations in English medieval towns', in Sosson, ed., *Les métiers*, 283–305.

⁵³ Caroline M. Barron, 'The parish fraternities of medieval London', in Caroline M. Barron and Christopher Harper-Bill, eds, *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society* (Woodbridge, 1985), 13–37, at p. 15.

⁵⁴ Gouron, *Réglementation des métiers*, 330.

⁵⁵ E. Levasseur, *Histoire des classes ouvrières et de l'industrie en France avant 1789*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Paris, 1900–1), i, 575 n.

⁵⁶ Reininghaus, *Die Entstehung*, 82 n., 84–5.

⁵⁷ Certain trades might be locally designated *métiers de danger*: matters of public concern requiring external supervision. Goldsmiths, barber-surgeons, apothecaries, and locksmiths were all occasionally so classified. See e.g. Gouron, *Réglementation des métiers*, 284–5.

COLLABORATION

Given the complexity and tensions of production and work relationships in the medieval town, those devices would need to be both sophisticated and adaptable. Of course, the pattern and scale of consumption in medieval towns were not what they would later become, nor was production either as diverse or specialized as it was to be in some of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century trades.⁵⁸ Yet medieval craft production already entailed complex collaboration between craftsmen and craftswomen and between workshops. The traditional image (lent spurious support by the statutes of official crafts, and enshrined in nostalgic urban folklore) of the autonomous master craftsman at work in his shop, which was also home to both his family and the apprentice whom he trained, was never more than one element in the mesh of labour relations. A more typical process is exemplified by the manufacture of such an item as a horse's saddle, which involved a series of specialist craftsmen. In London at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the various workers who contributed to the production and retail of saddles debated, as differentiated societies, their respective claims to the profits of the industry. The disputants included joiners, who made the saddle-trees; lorimers, who made the harness; and painters, who added decoration—in addition to saddlers, who oversaw these processes and were the principal agents for the sale of the finished products. The negotiations indicate both the perceived need for discussion between craft specialisms and the potential role in this context for workers' associations. Notwithstanding the heavier capital investment of the saddlers, the rhetoric of debate makes clear that the other interested craftsmen were neither inarticulate nor powerless, as is demonstrated also by the survival of joiners, lorimers, and painters as autonomous formal crafts, with their own respective officers and rules.⁵⁹

The vital, polymorphous relationship between different specialist crafts is highlighted also by the case of artistic production. The art made in the cities of the later Middle Ages was not the work of independent genius alone, despite the fondness of dealers and art historians since the sixteenth century for the mythologized individual master. An altarpiece completed in 1370–1 for the church of San Pier Maggiore in Florence, for example, which was formerly ascribed to a single artist, Jacopo di Cione, turns out on analysis both of related documents and of the surviving panel itself to have been the (in this respect altogether typical) product of an extended series of different designers, painters, carpenters, and gilders, between whose several shops the work was carried

⁵⁸ On consumption, see Dyer, 'The consumer and the market'.

⁵⁹ *Memorials of London and London Life in the XIIIth, XIVth, and XVth Centuries*, ed. H. T. Riley (London, 1868), 156–62.

in turn before its final installation.⁶⁰ In an analogous process, the tomb of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, in St Mary's church in Warwick, commissioned in 1447 and completed in 1450, was executed in London by a diverse team. A design for the effigy was supplied by a painter to a wood carver, who made the pattern for the bronze founder. The finished effigy was gilded by a Dutch goldsmith living in London. The founder, a marble carver, and a coppersmith then contracted to produce the plate on which the earl's image lies, the inscription which surrounds it, and the hearse or frame above the effigy. The tomb-chest, with niches for weeping figures cast in bronze, was made of Purbeck marble by a Dorset sculptor. The result is a magnificent and partly unique design.⁶¹ This form of the division of labour, by cutting across the separation between diverse specialisms, had the important consequence that it significantly qualified the control exercised by the masters of a given craft over the techniques and styles of manufacture of complex products. The diversity and inventiveness of Italian altarpiece design at the period of the San Pier Maggiore commission, or of fifteenth-century English sculpture, are clear warnings against any general assumption that the regulation of formal craft organizations was a necessarily effective restraint upon innovation.

The production of art illustrates, in addition, the no less widespread phenomenon of a master craftsman contracted to work for another in order to expedite a complex commission. Such temporary entrepreneurial arrangements were extremely common, even though the individuals involved might belong to formal craft organizations whose statutes implicitly precluded them, treating the qualified master as though he were, *tout court*, the independent master of a workshop. Exceptions included the Tournai craft of painters, which expressly countenanced subcontracting.⁶² Many other crafts—those of the building trades of Bruges, for instance—simply made no reference to it, leaving the way open in practice to substantial entrepreneurial initiatives. Certain Brugeois masons, on the strength of their ability to hire and control complex subordinate labour resources, established themselves as an elite group of site managers.⁶³ The panel painters of the same city, responding to

⁶⁰ David Bomford et al., *Art in the Making: Italian Painting before 1400* (National Gallery, London, 1989), 156–89.

⁶¹ *Gothic: Art for England 1400–1547*, ed. Richard Marks and Paul Williamson (London, 2003), 224–5 (catalogue entry by Philip Lankester, with bibliography). In general on the methods of production of sculpture in late-medieval England and elsewhere, see Phillip Lindley, 'Gothic sculpture: studio and workshop practices', in Phillip Lindley, ed., *Making Medieval Art* (Donnington, 2003), 54–80.

⁶² Lorne Campbell, 'The early Netherlandish painters and their workshops', in D. Hollanders-Favart and R. van Schoute, eds, *Le dessin sous-jacent dans la peinture. Colloque III: Le problème Maître de Flémalle–van der Weyden* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1981), 43–61, at p. 50.

⁶³ Jean-Pierre Sosson, *Les travaux publics de la ville de Bruges, XIVe–XVe siècles* (Brussels, 1977), 201 and *passim*.

market demand for their products, overcame the conservative influence of their craft regulations to subcontract commissions and increase their output.⁶⁴ The employment of 'foreigns'—unregistered workers living either within or beyond the city limits—was also a constant source of debate although, once again, the issue was not clear-cut. The painters of London acknowledged the power of 'foreign' labour in their rules approved by the mayor in 1481, which allowed complete freedom to employ non-citizens, evidently on the ground that these men were otherwise capable of drawing all trade into their own black market.⁶⁵ The potential, within this corporate world of late-medieval crafts, for capital accumulation and for the extension of sub-contracting to achieve new technical solutions or economies of scale and increased market domination, shows that there was no single route to capitalist development.⁶⁶

MASTERS AND JOURNEYMEN: OVERLAPPING WORLDS

If it was necessary to build relationships of trust bridging diverse yet inter-related crafts, it was no less vital to construct ties of mutual understanding and loyalty across a relatively wide socio-economic range. The relation of employer to employed was subject to periodic reversals, both according to changing personal fortunes and to the nature of particular commissions. It was far from unusual for craftsmen, for a variety of reasons, to move to and fro across the line between wage-labour and independence, generating the need for a variety of shifting and often informal alliances. The erstwhile independent master forced by altered circumstances to give up his shop was a not unfamiliar figure: the weavers of London around 1300 included some who had formerly owned looms of their own, but who through poverty had reverted to the status of

⁶⁴ Jean-Pierre Sosson, 'Une approche des structures économiques d'un métier d'art: la corporation des peintres et selliers de Bruges (XVe–XVIe siècles)', *Revue des archéologues et historiens d'art de Louvain*, 3 (1970), 91–100, esp. pp. 91–2 n.

⁶⁵ Corporation of London Record Office (CLRO) City Journal 8, fols 242^v–243; *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London*, ed. R. R. Sharpe, 11 vols (London, 1899–1912) (*Cal. Letter-Book*), L, pp. 177–8 and see pp. 256–7, 284–5. Cappers who were employing 'alien' workers to make hats in London in the 1470s were roundly condemned by the official craft; yet the shearmen, in their craft ordinances of a few years earlier, had acknowledged the necessity of putting work out to 'foreigns', requiring only that the company be informed. CLRO City Journal 7, fols 58–9 (1473); *The Ordinances of the Clothworkers' Company, together with those of the Ancient Guilds or Fraternities of the Fullers and Shearers of the City of London* (London, 1881), pp. 145–52 (1452, registered 1453).

⁶⁶ Cf. Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, 'Subcontracting in guild-based export trades, thirteenth-eighteenth centuries', in Epstein and Prak, eds, *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy*, 81–113.

dependent servants.⁶⁷ The Venetian master-drafter who turned to executing piece-work for others was also recorded, as was the Veronese master of that craft who had been forced by poverty temporarily to leave the city, but wished subsequently to return; both types were treated in statutes current in the thirteenth century.⁶⁸ Similarly, the Parisian *Livre des métiers* of c.1272 refers to masters who turned journeymen 'either on account of poverty or by choice'.⁶⁹ Conversely, journeymen not infrequently enjoyed considerable scope for enterprise on their own account, whether or not in direct alliance with established masters, or with the latter's approval. Certain London skinners who never bothered to open a shop or pay for admission to the guild of masters rose to modest prosperity by working for customers in the craftsmen's own homes.⁷⁰ The many artisans who hawked their wares in the streets or at evening markets, for lack of business premises, included both qualified masters and those who had never been other than journeymen.⁷¹ Parisian statutes of the late thirteenth century recognized a class of journeymen below the rank of master who nevertheless managed their own shops.⁷² New ordinances in 1303 for the makers of *sarrasins*, high-quality woollen cloths, described servant-workers (*valets*) to whom the masters had entrusted substantial sums of money, evidently subcontracting to them a part of the business.⁷³ The city custom of Norwich, written soon after 1300, records the fact that some masters had been allowing both servants and apprentices scope to engage in wholesale trade, as a means of extending their own businesses at the expense of rival masters.⁷⁴ In London, too, an apprentice tailor might run a shop in his master's name.⁷⁵ Alternatively, two or more journeymen could form a confederation to raise the capital to open a shop or, where this was forbidden to non-masters, to enable one of the society to buy admission to the

⁶⁷ Frances Consitt, *The London Weavers' Company from the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, 1933), 213–16.

⁶⁸ Dennis Romano, *Patricians and Popolani: The Social Foundations of the Venetian Renaissance State* (Baltimore, MD, 1987), 72; *Gli antichi statuti delle arti veronesi*, ed. Luigi Simeoni (Monumenti Storici della R. Deputazione Veneta di Storia Patria, 2nd series, iv, 1914), 12.

⁶⁹ '... pluseur d'aus ont esté aucune foiz mestres, et sont devenuz vallez par poureté ou par leur volonté.' *Règlements sur les arts et métiers de Paris, rédigés au XIIIe siècle*, ed. G.-B. Depping (Paris, 1837), 140. See also Bronisław Geremek, *Le salariat dans l'artisanat parisien aux XIIIe–XVe siècles* (Paris, 1982), 42.

⁷⁰ Elspeth M. Veale, *The English Fur Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1966), 80.

⁷¹ Hawkers: e.g. *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, 343–4. Evening markets: e.g. *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, 33, 75, 339.

⁷² E. Martin Saint-Léon, *Histoire des corporations de métiers depuis leurs origines jusqu'à leur suppression en 1791* (Paris, 1897), 90.

⁷³ Geneviève Souchal, 'Études sur la tapisserie parisienne: règlements et techniques des tapissiers sarrasinois, hautelissiers et nostrez (vers 1260–vers 1350)', *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 123 (1965), 35–125, at p. 61.

⁷⁴ *Records of the City of Norwich*, i. 184–5, and see i. 370.

⁷⁵ Matthew P. Davies and Ann Saunders, *A History of the Merchant Taylors' Company* (Leeds, 2004), 59.

mastership in order that others could share its privileges by proxy.⁷⁶ In late fifteenth-century London, apprentices and journeymen of the cutlers' trade were reported to be conspiring as 'party fellows' to set up unofficial shops in secret.⁷⁷ A little earlier, journeymen tailors of the same city were said to be similarly collaborating in 'secret chambers'.⁷⁸ Individual cases reveal how easily relationships could be reversed. A glazier who had worked as a servant to another craftsman on a job at the Franciscan church in London in the late fourteenth century could shortly afterwards, as an independent worker in his own right, poach work on a different site from the same master, in spite of the latter's protests.⁷⁹ Such evidence begins to make it clear that, while distinctions and tensions certainly existed, masters and journeymen inhabited essentially the same economic and cultural environment, and that both alike needed to be adaptable and inventive in the formation of opportunistic alliances which multiplied in the interstices between the more formal and publicly licensed craft organizations.

The rules increasingly often laid down in the later Middle Ages by official organizations of master craftsmen, which restricted access to the mastership by imposing admission fees, and demanded that an apprentice submit a *chef-d'oeuvre* at the end of his term, were ostensibly opposed both to any widening of admission to the craft, and to technical innovation. In fact, very little is yet known for certain about the real prospects of junior craftsmen in the various trades. Blithe assertions about the sequence of promotion in some of the older historical literature are, indeed, no more than optimistic guesses,⁸⁰ and one could not now subscribe to the view, classically expressed by Sombart, that 'just as a student is a trainee clerk, and the latter on his way to become a judge, so the apprentice is simply a future journeyman, and the journeyman, a future master'.⁸¹ In certain areas of the urban economy, day-labourers were likely to remain perennial marginals, with low wages and poor status, their vulnerability compounded by suspicion and hostility towards unstable 'vagabonds' on the part of urban and royal authorities.⁸² Moreover, many crafts in the Middle

⁷⁶ Émile Coornaert, *Les corporations en France avant 1789* [1941], 2nd edn (Paris, 1968), 194 ff. Temporary enrolment in a craft organization could also be secured for the sole purpose of registering apprentices (whose terms of service would later be sold on to other employers): Levasseur, *Histoire des classes ouvrières*, i. 307–8.

⁷⁷ CLRO City Journal 9, fols 75–78^v (1485: 'where none of them by himself is of ability to set up open shop'); Charles Welch, *History of the Cutlers' Company of London*, 2 vols (London, 1916–23), i. 337–41.

⁷⁸ C. M. Clode, *Memorials of the Guild of Merchant Tailors of the Fraternity of St. John the Baptist in the City of London* (London, 1875), 211.

⁷⁹ CLRO MS MC 1 (Mayor's Court Original Bills) 1/112 (late fourteenth century).

⁸⁰ e.g. Doren, *Le arti fiorentine*, ii. 187.

⁸¹ Werner Sombart, *Der moderne Kapitalismus*, 2nd edn (München, 1916), i. 197.

⁸² Bronisław Geremek, 'Le refus du travail dans la société urbaine du bas Moyen Âge', in J. Hamesse and C. Muraille-Sameran, eds, *Le Travail au Moyen Âge* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1990), 379–94.

Ages recorded customs which gave preferential admission to the mastership to sons of existing masters. Among the butchers of Paris or the brewers of Ghent in the fifteenth century, for example, inheritance was prevalent.⁸³ However, generalizations based upon such particular cases are greatly misleading. Practice varied widely according to the circumstances of time and trade. The danger, in this respect, of a simplistic reading of craft rules is demonstrated by the Bruges barrel-makers, whose important trade supplied the packaging for the goods of European commerce. Although by statute the sons of masters were ostensibly favoured here as well, in fact the register of the craft from 1375 to 1500 shows that, so far from becoming a dynastic preserve, the craft was developing in the opposite direction. In the first part of the period, sons of masters only occasionally represented more than 50 per cent of the annual total of new masters (usually five), but towards 1500 the proportion fell lower still, almost to zero. In the unprecedentedly fluid labour market of the later Middle Ages, craft rules which offered masters incentives to keep sons in the trade should perhaps be seen less as a primarily oligarchical policy than as a response to the possibility and the attraction of rival careers. The Bruges coopers demonstrate that there was scope, such rules notwithstanding, for young men to succeed in trades other than those of their fathers. The records of the same company show, moreover, that although a few rich individuals emerged within the craft who held several offices, a very wide range of the membership held office at some stage in their careers.⁸⁴

The scale of the employment of wage-labour in the Middle Ages was far greater than used to be thought, and it probably occupied as significant a proportion of the work-force in 1300 as in 1500.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, while allowing that the prospects of material advancement varied considerably, it is easy to exaggerate the difference of perspective between the shop-owning master and the wage-dependent journeyman unable to afford to set up on his own. Throughout the Middle Ages, it remained rare for the journeymen of a craft, at any particular moment, significantly to outnumber the local masters. In mid-fifteenth-century Strasbourg, in the smaller crafts of bakers, tailors, smiths, cobblers, furriers, and tanners, the number of masters roughly equalled or exceeded that of the journeymen.⁸⁶ This was generally true even of those few medieval industries operating on a large scale, such as the Florentine cloth

⁸³ Lespinasse, *Les métiers*, i. 260, 270; Wim Blockmans and Walter Prevenier, *The Burgundian Netherlands* (Cambridge, 1986), 164.

⁸⁴ Jean-Pierre Sosson, 'La structure sociale de la corporation médiévale: l'exemple des tonneliers de Bruges de 1350 à 1500', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 44 (1966), 457–78.

⁸⁵ Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), 220, makes this point in respect of England.

⁸⁶ Reininghaus, *Die Entstehung*, 44; Engel, *Die deutsche Stadt*, 229–30; René van Santbergen, *Les bons métiers des meuniers, des boulangers et des brasseurs de la cité de Liège* (Liège, 1949), 154–5.

industry, in which between one-third and one-half of the late fourteenth-century labour force were wage-labourers.⁸⁷ The shock dealt to the Florentine economy at this period by plague encouraged the brief manifestation, during the Ciompi disturbances of 1378, of a sense of solidarity among hired workers and small masters, who set themselves up against the wealthy entrepreneurs. However, a major reason for the transience of that moment, and for its failure to effect lasting change in the structure of the industry, was the very diversity of those brought fleetingly together under the umbrella of 'the organization of humble people' (*arte del popolo minuto*). In the slightly longer run, as the political moment passed and the cloth industry as a whole contracted, shortage of work impelled hired labourers to cultivate, on an individual basis, personalized relationships with particular masters which cut, once again, across the class divide.⁸⁸

In other cases where tensions arose between craftsmen of differing status, the cause was often a function of age and the career cycle, rather than of an insurmountable gulf within the work-force. In a revolt within the London company of goldsmiths in the 1470s, following which ten ringleaders were condemned by the seniors and temporarily imprisoned, the rebellious group comprised journeymen in their twenties who were on their way to becoming masters, no fewer than four of whom were, in due course, to hold office in the company.⁸⁹ The journeymen bakers of London, challenged by the masters in 1441 as to their right to hold a fraternity, pointed out that the masters themselves had almost all, in their own youth, belonged to the same society.⁹⁰ Likewise, when the journeymen tailors of fifteenth-century Strasbourg challenged the masters for the right to meet as junior members of the craft, they urged that this old custom had been regarded as good enough when the masters were young, and journeymen themselves.⁹¹ The fifteenth-century London silk-throwster who finished her apprenticeship in debt to her mistress, but who twelve years later was established as an independent operator employing servants of her own, had negotiated a difficult transition effected also

⁸⁷ S. K. Cohn, *The Laboring Classes in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980), 69, 206.

⁸⁸ Niccolò Rodolico, *I Ciompi: una pagina di storia del proletario operaio* (Florence, 1945), 142; Michel Mollat and Philippe Wolff, *The Popular Revolutions of the Middle Ages*, transl. A. L. Lytton-Sells (London, 1973), 157–8; Franco Franceschi, *Oltre il 'Tumulto': lavoratori fiorentini dell'Arte della Lana fra Tre e Quattrocento* (Florence, 1993), 330–1; Patrick Lantschner, 'The logic of political conflict in the late Middle Ages: a comparative study of urban political conflicts in Italy and the southern Low Countries, c.1370–1440', D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University (2013).

⁸⁹ T. F. Reddaway and L. E. M. Walker, *The Early History of the Goldsmiths' Company, 1327–1509* (London, 1975), 154.

⁹⁰ *Cal. Letter-Book K*, pp. 263–6.

⁹¹ Eric Maschke, 'Die Unterschichten der mittelalterlichen Städte Deutschlands' [1967], repr. in C. Haase, ed., *Die Stadt des Mittelalters*, 3 vols (Darmstadt, 1970–3), iii. 345–454, at pp. 416–17.

by thousands of others.⁹² The widespread, albeit occasionally contested, perception that masters and journeymen, together with their families, inhabited the same world and faced common pressures was made unusually explicit in an ordinance of the Pisan goldsmiths of 1448:

if by chance some master or journeyman or mother or wife or sister of a goldsmith should happen to die . . . the captains or consuls are required to call together all the goldsmiths and to go to honour the deceased and accompany him to his burial themselves, and this must be done for the small and the great, whatever family they belong to.⁹³

The picture which is emerging is not one of a single hierarchical structure, nor one confined to compartmentalized and polarized interests. On the contrary, labourers in the medieval town needed to be prepared periodically to negotiate new working alliances with others, both in their own and in related crafts. Such alliances frequently cut across ostensible horizontal distinctions of status. The Venetian glassworks of Murano were characterized, from the thirteenth century onwards, by a markedly stratified work-force in which a minority of *patroni*, the owners of the furnaces, employed the more numerous, disadvantaged *maestri* of the craft.⁹⁴ Yet such an arrangement, in practice, contained its own restriction on the employers' crude exploitation of their seniority. The office-holding *patroni* acknowledged as much when, in 1305, they attempted to place a ceiling on the contract-rates paid by *patroni* in general. Some of the latter, it was stated, had been succumbing to 'threats' delivered by labourers who used their option of working for others to demand higher salaries. Private alliances between particular *maestri* and *patroni* thus transcended the formal horizontal divide.⁹⁵ Judicial records of the smiths of Basel in the fifteenth century similarly reveal that divisions by no means always fell between master and journeyman: here again, these two were regularly found in mutually advantageous confederacy (and jointly in breach of craft rules).⁹⁶ Although in any particular context it was the master who enjoyed the greater status, there was not necessarily a marked differential between the wages of master and servant, a fact which was accentuated in the later Middle Ages by labour shortages. For weaving diaper cloth in mid-fifteenth-century London, the journeyman received half the cost paid by the

⁹² Marion K. Dale, 'The London silkwomen of the fifteenth century', *Economic History Review*, 1st series, 4 (1932–34), 324–35, at pp. 326–7.

⁹³ Franco Franceschi, 'The rituals of the guilds: examples from Tuscan cities, thirteenth to sixteenth centuries', in Samuel Cohn, Jr., Marcello Fantoni, Franco Franceschi, and Fabrizio Ricciardelli, eds, *Late Medieval and Early Modern Ritual: Studies in Italian Urban Culture* (Turnhout, 2013), 65–92, at p. 75.

⁹⁴ *Capitolari delle arti veneziane*, ed. Monticcolo, ii. 61–98.

⁹⁵ *Capitolari delle arti veneziane*, ed. Monticcolo, ii. 93–4.

⁹⁶ Katharina Simon-Muscheid, *Basler Handwerkszünfte im Spätmittelalter* (Berne, 1988), 85.

customer, his master the other half.⁹⁷ The difficulty of retaining good workers gave rise to incentive payments to journeymen: tips given by the master's wife, and bonuses, called 'courtesies', delivered by the master at the end of a contract term, are recorded in Bristol around 1400.⁹⁸ Innumerable regulations, such as a London mayoral ordinance of 1350, against excessive payments by masters to journeymen and servants, are equally telling.⁹⁹ Shared hostility to a particular merchant could precipitate such a combined protest as was led by fourteen master-fullers and three journeymen-fullers of London in 1366, who together managed to call out a strike of the other journeymen in the city.¹⁰⁰ Anxiety about competition from immigrant workers could also on occasion draw masters and journeymen together in a common cause, as was demonstrated in an association formed by the English weavers of London in 1378, in order to protest against the Flemings of the craft who had been entering the city under cover of royal protection: in the government of this fraternity, masters and journeymen took equal shares.¹⁰¹ Barracking civic elections at London together in 1416, masters, journeymen, and apprentices coordinated their political protests in a united demonstration.¹⁰² Class distinctions were not negated by such fraternizing, but while it continued, class was evidently not the principal determinant of behaviour.¹⁰³ These deals could be negotiated in the most varied and informal of ways; but in the brokering of contracts for labour, both official craft organizations and voluntary clubs or fraternities seem to have played particularly important roles.

The publicly recognized craft organizations were hierarchically structured, and to varying degrees they were able to determine both who should and who should not belong. The pressure to join could in certain circumstances be irresistible, although the term *Zunftzwang*, which was invoked in nineteenth-century debates over state control of the economy, and which has continued to be used in German historical writing on the medieval crafts, may be a misleading reification of relationships which were, in practice, less clear-cut:

⁹⁷ Consitt, *Weavers*, 77, 210.

⁹⁸ *The Little Red Book of Bristol*, ed. F. B. Bickley, 2 vols (Bristol and London, 1900), ii. 106.

⁹⁹ e.g. *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, 253–6. Note also the illegal practice of masters who retained particular apprentices by paying them wages, recorded in London in the first half of the 16th century and probably known at earlier periods, e.g. CLRO City Repertory Book 9, fols 123^v, 132 (1535), 241^v (1537).

¹⁰⁰ *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls preserved among the Archives of the City of London*, ed. A. H. Thomas and P. E. Jones, 6 vols (Cambridge, 1926–61) (*Cal. Plea and Mem. Rolls*), 1364–81, pp. 54–6.

¹⁰¹ Consitt, *Weavers*, 51. In a combined attempt to fix prices of their products in 1507, masters and journeymen of the founders' craft of London met together in conclave. *Select Cases before the King's Council in the Star Chamber*, ed. I. S. Leadam, Selden Society, 16 (1903), 262–71, esp. pp. 270–1.

¹⁰² *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, 636.

¹⁰³ Adam Smith had anticipated this: Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, 2 vols (Oxford, 1976), i. 86 (I.viii).

it may implicitly give too much credence to the effectiveness of the statutes published by the crafts themselves. Yet if the terms of membership were, in any event, closely monitored, the masters needed none the less to cultivate wider relationships, and pragmatic considerations complicated the hierarchy embodied in the rules. Many crafts explicitly accorded at least a limited voice at meetings to those other than fully fledged masters, while the repetition of complaints about the presence both of journeymen and women strongly suggests that such attendance, with limited electoral rights, was in practice fairly widespread.¹⁰⁴ In particular instances, notably in certain branches of the cloth trade, an individual 'putter-out' (*Verleger*) might exercise virtually unchecked power over the dependent work-force.¹⁰⁵ More commonly, however, mutual interest dictated a degree of cooperation, which was often enabled either by the adjustment of official craft controls, or through the meetings of an unofficial fraternity. In the Italian cotton industry, for example, a hierarchy had emerged by the thirteenth century whereby the weavers and beaters were to a significant extent dependent on the 'masters', or cloth-dealers, for the supply of raw materials or for access to the market. Yet the organizational structure which was established at this period in the major centres of Milan, Verona, and Venice accorded separate representation to each of these groups within a tripartite craft of cotton-manufacturers (*domus pignolatorum*).¹⁰⁶ In general, the yoking together of distinct crafts has been too readily interpreted as the capitalistic extension of a managerial monopoly and the further enfeeblement of the weaker craftsmen.¹⁰⁷ Of course, economic and political differences existed, but where details are recorded, relations seem not to have been so simple. In a characteristic instance, the amalgamation in 1502 of the London guilds of leathersellers and of glovers-pursers (the latter the outcome of another recent combination of crafts), the fact that the leading

¹⁰⁴ e.g. H. Hauser, *Ouvriers du temps passé (XVe–XVIe siècles)* (Paris, 1899), 171–2; Santbergen, *Les bons métiers*, 179–80, 190.

¹⁰⁵ The two cases which are prominent in the historiography are those of Jehan Boinebroke in the 13th century and Jacques Coeur in the 15th: G. Espinas, *Les origines du capitalisme*, 4 vols (Lille, 1933–49), i, *Sire Jehan Boinebroke, patricien et drapier douaisien (?–1286 environ)*; Michel Mollat, *Jacques Coeur, ou, l'esprit d'entreprise au XVe siècle* (Paris, 1988). The historical attention devoted to one or two outstandingly wealthy individual entrepreneurs, however, has been disproportionate to their significance.

¹⁰⁶ M. F. Mazzaoui, *The Italian Cotton Industry in the Later Middle Ages, 1100–1600* (Cambridge, 1981), 107–9.

¹⁰⁷ For classic statements of this view, with respect to England, see George Unwin, *Industrial Organisation in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1904), 70–102; Ephraim Lipson, *The Economic History of England*, i, *The Middle Ages*, 8th edn (London, 1946), 104 ff. For a rare critique of received assumptions, which—although flawed by a lack of chronological rigour, and by the author's adoption of the erroneous concept of 'the gild or handicraft system'—draws attention to limits on the power of merchant capital, and to the continuing fluidity of negotiation and compromise between different groups of craftsmen and traders, see Stella Kramer, *The English Craft Gilds: Studies in their Progress and Decline* (New York, 1927), 63, 105–6, 124, and *passim*.

leathersellers had the greatest investments in the entire leather trade did not give them exclusive control. The 'lesser' crafts continued to legislate for their own spheres of activity, and also maintained their prestige in other ways which betray the compromises typical of such arrangements. The common hall of the amalgamated craft was that of the leathersellers, but following the union, the decorations within the hall depicting the Resurrection of Christ, with which the leathersellers' particular fraternity was associated, were replaced by hangings showing stories of the Virgin Mary, the traditional patroness of the glovers.¹⁰⁸

FRATERNAL NETWORKS

As this evidence makes clear, many working people in the Middle Ages formed fraternities without ever formalizing their association in an official craft; however, by the late fourteenth century there were few organized crafts which lacked a corresponding fraternity. Alongside their spiritual and social ends, these clubs facilitated the adjustment of work relations in a variety of ways, depending upon the particular profile of their memberships. The men and women who practised the tanning of leather in fourteenth-century London, a close-knit group focused on their workplace in Cheapside, formed a 'fraternity' amongst themselves, which was also referred to as 'the brothers and sisters of the house of Tanners' Seld'.¹⁰⁹ The thirteenth-century fraternity of the tailors of Arras, the Charity of St Julian, comprised masters, journeymen, and apprentices, the statutes requiring each and all to attend the *plaid*s, or councils, of the guild.¹¹⁰ The practical 'help of the company' which could be offered to members included, in addition to the personal contacts made naturally on the occasion of fraternity reunions, assistance at will by the other members of the society to enable a brother or sister to survive a period of unemployment, as was provided by the fourteenth-century statutes of the London fraternity of St Fabian and St Sebastian.¹¹¹ Such societies made small or larger loans to aid members in their businesses.¹¹² A small group of five

¹⁰⁸ W. H. Black, *The History and Antiquities of the Worshipful Company of Leathersellers of the City of London* (London, 1871), 124–5, 43, and fig. 8.

¹⁰⁹ Derek Keene, 'Tanners' widows, 1300–1350', in Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton, eds, *Medieval London Widows 1300–1500* (London, 1994), 1–27, at pp. 12, 22. A 'seld' was a shop.

¹¹⁰ Georges Espinas, *Les origines du droit d'association dans les villes de l'Artois et de la Flandre française jusqu'au début du XVIe siècle*, 2 vols (Lille, 1941–2), ii, 125, 159–63, 167.

¹¹¹ *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 9–11; see *Parish Fraternity Register: Fraternity of the Holy Trinity and SS. Fabian and Sebastian in the Parish of St. Botolph Without Aldersgate*, ed. Patricia Basing, London Record Society, 18 (1982), 80–1.

¹¹² See pp. 156–8 in the present study.

inhabitants of Nottingham in the early fourteenth century, who bound themselves to maintain a candle in honour of the Virgin Mary, agreed in addition to contribute 1d. every week to be invested towards their 'common profit'.¹¹³ An impoverished brother or sister of a London fraternity received a hood of the company's livery as a gift, so that his or her membership of this small yet honourable association would continue to be evident.¹¹⁴ The members of a great many fraternities were entitled to cash handouts during temporary sickness or unemployment, in connection with which statutes occasionally alluded directly to the hazards and injustices of work relations.¹¹⁵ The fraternity of St Mary in the church of All Hallows, London Wall, in London, offered legal or charitable assistance to any member whose son or daughter had been unjustly treated by the master to whom he or she had been apprenticed.¹¹⁶ A provision for the resolution of disputes was extremely common in fraternities and was particularly of potential benefit to worker members, who would thereby save on legal fees arising from contracts with brothers and sisters of the society.¹¹⁷ Each of these forms of solidarity rested upon deliberately fostered relationships of trust.

The fact that women were members of the majority of fraternities in northern Europe, and in many of those in the south, is worthy of emphasis in this context. It is of particular significance in view of women's increasing exclusion from official associations of master craftsmen, within which, in any case, they never held office.¹¹⁸ Journeymen tended to join with the male masters in deprecating the value of women's work (perceived by the men as competitive and threatening), and journeymen's drinking clubs, unlike the more pluralistic fraternities to which journeymen also belonged, were generally male preserves.¹¹⁹ Yet women's participation in the fraternities gave them opportunities to present themselves as credit-worthy and so to claim, alongside men, a standing in the world of work. In addition, women might claim immediate material advantages from guild membership, including payment of sickness benefits and financial loans, such as were made by a high proportion

¹¹³ *Records of the Borough of Nottingham 1155–1547*, ed. W. H. Stevenson, 3 vols (London and Nottingham, 1882–5), i. 72–5.

¹¹⁴ See p. 66 in the present study.

¹¹⁵ See also pp. 83–4 in the present study.

¹¹⁶ TNA: PRO C 47/42/206.

¹¹⁷ See pp. 69–71, 143–4 in the present study.

¹¹⁸ Women were not altogether absent from the craft organizations, e.g. Levi Fox, 'The Coventry guilds and trading companies, with special reference to the position of women', in Birmingham Archaeological Society, *Essays in Honour of P. B. Chatwin* (Oxford, 1962), 13–26. But they were not permitted to hold positions of influence within them. Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society 1300–1620* (Cambridge, 2005), 121, 133.

¹¹⁹ For the declining scope (which had never been large) for female participation in formal craft organizations in the later Middle Ages, see Martha C. Howell, *Women, Production and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (Chicago, 1986). For the growing hostility of journeymen towards female labour in the early modern period, see Merry E. Wiesner, 'Wandervogels and women: journeymen's concepts of masculinity in early modern Germany', *Journal of Social History*, 24 (1991), 767–82.

of the fraternities.¹²⁰ In medieval England (unlike in Paris or Cologne) no formal guilds consisting exclusively of women are known to have existed. But the women silk-workers of late-medieval London, although they never formalized their association, none the less formed a sufficient sense of solidarity and common purpose to enable them to submit collective petitions in relation to their craft on a number of occasions.¹²¹ Again, other associations were open to such women: one of the known London silkwomen moved in the circle of a fraternity, associated with the church of St Lawrence Jewry, known as 'the penny brethren'.¹²² Although their presence in the documentary record is inevitably fleeting, women's groups existed in a variety of forms, from the gatherings of alewives satirized in masculine poetry to the 'sisterhood' of St Anne in Southwark, and the wives of the town who organized the play of the Virgin's Assumption in fifteenth-century Chester.¹²³ All of these associations closely resembled fraternities, and deserve to be placed with them on the same spectrum.

The meetings of a fraternity offered opportunities to each of its members, whatever his or her personal standing. The Venetian master cobblers who in 1305 appear to have used the annual feast of the cobblers' guild as an opportunity to win votes in forthcoming elections were engaging in what was doubtless a typical attempt (albeit not necessarily successful) by the elite to mobilize support among the members of the craft at large, whether enfranchised or not.¹²⁴ It was equally characteristic that the journeymen blacksmiths of London, while retaining a distinct craft organization of their own, were in 1434 readmitted by the masters of the trade to their fraternity of St Loy, after a period of exclusion. The masters' desire to supervise the hired workers combined in such cases with the will to extend occasions for fraternizing, economic dealing, and political liaison.¹²⁵ In a competitive late-medieval labour market such loyalties would always be worth the winning; and for such cultivation of goodwill, the confraternity banquet provided an ideal occasion.¹²⁶ Where masters and journeymen were officially segregated into distinct

¹²⁰ See pp. 83–6 in the present study. For the general absence of women's craft associations from England, see Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life-Cycle*, 319, but see also p. 132 in this work for a possible guild of female wool-packers at Southampton. A woman's rights as a member of a craft organization are discussed in Marianne Kowaleski and Judith M. Bennett, 'Crafts, guilds, and women in the Middle Ages: fifty years after Marian K. Dale', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14 (1989), 474–88.

¹²¹ Dale, 'London silkwomen'.

¹²² Anne Sutton, 'Alice Claver, silkwoman', in Barron and Sutton, eds, *Medieval London Widows*, 129–42, at p. 131. See also pp. 110–11 in the present study.

¹²³ Katherine L. French, *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion after the Black Death* (Philadelphia, 2008), 126–32; Gervase Rosser, 'Romyng, Eleanor [Elynour Rummyng]', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

¹²⁴ *Capitolari delle arti veneziane*, ed. Monticolo, ii. 546.

¹²⁵ *Ordinances of Some Secular Guilds of London*, ed. H. C. Coote (London, 1871), 41–4.

¹²⁶ See Chapter 4.

craft organizations, the creation of such a brotherhood might be explicitly identified as a means to bridge the gap in relations. At Rottweil in 1477, the official institution of miscellaneous journeymen (*Gesellengilde*) reported that it had 'founded a fraternity (*Bruderschaft*) with the organized crafts (*Zünfte*) of the cobblers and the bakers'. Similarly, masters participated in what originated as the journeymen's fraternities of the wheelwrights and the millers respectively in late-medieval Schlettstadt.¹²⁷ The masters' desire for admission to a club primarily of journeymen might be motivated in part by suspicion of confederacy among the hired labourers, but it was no less likely to derive from a desire to share in the prestige of a respected pious association. The cobblers' confraternity of St Crispin and St Crispinian in Paris originated in 1379 as a society of journeymen (*compagnons*). In 1414–15, this guild was given some relics of its holy patrons, together with the bonus of an indulgence for all its associates. The indulgence was increased in 1429, in which year the masters of the craft, seeing the guild's success, petitioned for the right to be admitted. An amalgamated brotherhood was thus created, in which, for over a century, the officers were elected in alternate years by the masters and journeymen in turn.¹²⁸ Whatever the trigger for its foundation, and whatever the ambitions of certain participating masters to control the wage-labourers, such an association enabled discussion of the shared and respective interests of masters and journeymen alike. Banded together in such a group, the gathered work-force could also be an extremely powerful political agency, as was demonstrated, for example, in the rebellious unions of masters and journeymen at Strasbourg in 1356 and 1363.¹²⁹

Many of the 'fraternities of journeymen' recorded in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are therefore likely to have included an element of master craftsmen, below the rank of the richer merchants. Even the more extreme journeymen's rhetoric of confrontation with the elite revealed the compromises which occurred in practice. The journeymen spurriers of London formed a fraternity in the 1370s to which they admitted their fellow-workers, 'but no householder—unless he was sworn while still a journeyman'.¹³⁰ When, in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a number of such workers' organizations were given constitutional recognition by their respective senior guilds, the junior or 'yeomanry' company typically comprised both journeymen and masters (especially the less prosperous ones) together.¹³¹ In the

¹²⁷ Reininghaus, *Die Entstehung*, 124. See also Knut Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen und Lohnarbeiter: Untersuchungen zu oberrheinischen und oberdeutschen Stadtgeschichte des 14. bis 17. Jahrhunderts* (Sigmaringen, 1985), 169–70.

¹²⁸ *Recueil des titres de la Confrérie de Saint Crespin et Saint Crespinian, érigée en l'Église de Paris* (Paris, 1754): a copy in Paris, Archives Nationales, S118.

¹²⁹ Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen und Lohnarbeiter*, 165.

¹³⁰ *Cal. Plea and Mem. Rolls, 1364–81*, pp. 291–4.

¹³¹ Unwin, *Industrial Organisation*, 58–60; Steven Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge, 1989), 219–22.

1530s the yeomanry of the pewterers of London, by this date formally under the aegis of the livery company of senior masters, was none the less capable of winning from the upper body concessions regarding the employment of servants.¹³² Where, in the face of independent association amongst the yeomanry of a craft, the senior officers adopted the alternative policy of suppression, their failure was often manifest. Although the master cordwainers of York about 1430 forbade their wage-earning servants (*servientes stipendarii*) to form illegal confederacies, the latter are nevertheless known to have continued thereafter to meet regularly in a fraternity of St Augustine which was quite distinct from the masters' guild.¹³³ Similarly at Coventry, despite repeated public bans on journeymen's associations, such extra-legal bodies continued to flourish throughout the later Middle Ages.¹³⁴ The repetition of hostile legislation is, indeed, in itself revealing. The informality and voluntarism of these unofficial associations, which render them evanescent presences in the historical record, were the very bases of their strength as forums for the creation of relationships of mutual trust amongst their members.

PRESSURE GROUPS

The most common feature of these diverse associations of workers was the assembly in the form of a pious fraternity. On this basis, collections were made in a common box, in the first instance for candles, providing a fund which could also be used both for mutual assistance within the group, and to sustain legal or other conflicts with external interests. In the later fourteenth century the journeymen carriers of London each contributed $\frac{1}{4}d.$ every week, and the journeymen spurriers $\frac{1}{2}d.$, to their respective fraternities—at a period when a craftsman's daily wage ranged between $4d.$ and $6d.$ ¹³⁵ Their activities tend, naturally, to be recorded only in unsympathetic sources, but their own statutes, in so far as these survive, go some way to confirm their critics' claims that they were determined to protect one another's interests, to make a joint stand against those with greater financial or political resources than themselves, and

¹³² C. Welch, *History of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers of the City of London*, 2 vols (London, 1902), i. 135.

¹³³ David Palliser, 'The trade gilds of Tudor York', in Peter Clark and Paul Slack, eds, *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500–1700* (London, 1972), 86–116, at pp. 104, 115.

¹³⁴ *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Fifteenth Report, Appendix, Part X* (London, 1899), 117; *The Coventry Leet Book*, ed. Mary Dormer Harris, 4 vols, Early English Text Society, original series, 134, 135, 138, 146 (1907–13) (continuously paginated), 656, 687, 694, 792. See p. 180 in the present study.

¹³⁵ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS London Rolls, 3; printed in Caroline M. Barron and Laura Wright, 'The London Middle English guild certificates of 1388–9', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 39 (1995), 108–45, at pp. 124–5; *Cal. Plea and Mem. Rolls, 1364–81*, pp. 291–4.

to defend the individual member who reported maltreatment by his or her employer. The fraternity mass provided an occasion for regular meetings, and to the normal feasts could be added special services for the vigils or anniversaries of deceased members, of the kind observed in all fraternities. In 1396 the master saddlers of London complained that their servants were using memorial services of their illegal fraternity as an excuse to miss work and confederate among themselves.¹³⁶ When major feast days were shared in common between different clubs of this kind, mutual discussion amongst the journeymen of more than one trade was facilitated, doubtless at gatherings in ale-houses after the mass: it is noticeable that in late-medieval London, no fewer than four fraternities of journeymen, those of the saddlers, the skinners, the curriers, and the cordwainers, held their principal annual meeting on the same feast of the Assumption (15 August).¹³⁷ It is also notable that such groups often preferred to attach themselves to churches on the physical and jurisdictional margins of the city, whether suburban parish churches or friaries. In the latter situation an additional source of strength could be the patronage of the monks: in the case of an illicit fraternity of the journeymen cordwainers of London, denounced in 1387, a Dominican at the Blackfriars' church, to which the club was affiliated, had been negotiating to secure papal approval for the society.¹³⁸ Alien craftsmen in London reveal in their testaments a recurrent attachment to fraternities based in the churches of the friars, whose broad vision (and sometimes foreign extraction) evidently appealed to some of the 'foreigns' who tried to settle in the capital.¹³⁹ Working people's fraternities were by no means always perceived as subversive, although by their nature the records tend to highlight this attitude. What deserves particular emphasis is the ease with which they could be formed, and the difficulty, where this was sought, of effecting their suppression.

In the manner of fraternities in general, these associations fostered among their members a vital sense of mutual trust, and a concomitant degree of assurance in their dealings with the wider world. When a journeyman skinner working in the London parish of St John Walbrook, where his craft was chiefly concentrated, was charged in 1455 with a debt of 7s. 2d. owing to a certain widow (perhaps his landlady) for bread and beer, the four wardens of the fraternity of journeymen skinners stood surety for the repayment of

¹³⁶ *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, 542.

¹³⁷ Saddlers: *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, 542 (1396); skinners: Veale, *Fur Trade*, 112–13 (late 14th century); curriers: Oxford, Bodleian Library, London Rolls, 3 (1389); cordwainers: *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, 495 (1387).

¹³⁸ *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, 495. The friars recur with perhaps significant frequency in such roles. See Alice Stopford Green, *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century*, 2 vols (London, 1894), ii. 125 n.

¹³⁹ For foreign artists in this group, see Sophie Cassagnes-Brouquet, *L'art en famille: les milieux artistiques à Londres à la fin du Moyen Âge (1350–1530)* (Turnhout, 2005), 237–8.

the sum.¹⁴⁰ Rules touching the material welfare of members bore inevitably on relations with employers. The fraternity of yeomen curriers of London, founded in 1367, provided that 'a man that goes idle for a day by his master's default, shall have 2d. a day' from the company, that is, just enough food for himself and his family. Once again, it was typical of these societies that the same fraternity warned each member that 'if he go play in his own default when he should work, he shall restore to his master . . . 4d. a day'.¹⁴¹ The rhetorical framework of the journeymen's discussions thus shared a fundamental moral attitude in common with the outlook of similarly self-respecting guildsmen and householders, and might be a means of expressing solidarity as well as opposition. Nevertheless, tensions between servants and masters did periodically mount to the point of violent confrontation, in which journeymen's fraternities played a critical role. In 1441 the journeymen bakers of London staged a strike for higher wages, which they organized in the 'revelling hall' of their fraternity. The official inquiry revealed in addition an agreement that, where three or four journeymen were employed by a single master, as appears to have been common in this craft, if the master fired one the others would also leave out of solidarity.¹⁴² The potential persuasive power of such a body is clear. A negotiated agreement between the journeymen and the masters in the weaving industry of Coventry in 1424, which evidently followed a similar staged protest by the workers, incorporated significant concessions to the journeymen in the form of assurances, with penalties on default, that employment would be given to them in preference to 'foreign' craftsmen resident outside the city.¹⁴³ Another fraternity at Coventry, formed of the lesser craftsmen ('laboriaros et artifices mediocres') of the town and its hinterland, received official recognition in 1384, only to be suppressed shortly afterwards on suspicion of subversive activities. In 1407 the artisans reconstituted themselves as a new fraternity of St Anne for 'the servants of the tailors and other artificers'. This too was condemned, following complaints from the wealthier fraternities of Holy Trinity and Corpus Christi; yet despite a mayoral decree, backed up by the king, St Anne's fraternity was still flourishing seven years later. Renewed attempts at forcible dissolution simply had the effect of driving the artisans into another fraternity, this time dedicated to St George. When, in 1425, St George's fraternity in turn was banned, its chapel became the property of yet another society, re-formed at this very period, with the name of 'the

¹⁴⁰ CLRO MS MC 1/3/325.

¹⁴¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, London Rolls, 3. For typical wages and basic costs of living, see Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c.1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1989), 216 ff.

¹⁴² CLRO City Journal 2, fol. 128^v; Journal 3, fols 102^v–103; *Cal. Letter Book K*, pp. 263–6; Sylvia Thrupp, *A Short History of the Worshipful Company of Bakers of London* (London, 1933), 110–11 (citing only part of the manuscript evidence, and giving a somewhat different emphasis).

¹⁴³ *Coventry Leet Book*, ed. Harris, 91–6.

fullers and tailors of the Nativity of Christ', whose membership doubtless bore a close similarity to its predecessors.¹⁴⁴ Servants and small masters will often have lacked sufficient power to make their views prevail. None the less, their ability to coordinate a collective response to perceived challenges, and to engage in constructive debate with employers, wholesalers, and magistrates, is made repeatedly evident.

Many fraternities of tradespeople additionally broadened the range of their clientage by the admission of members who were not professionally engaged in a particular craft. Such were the 'autres bourgeois du faubourg St Germain l'Auxerrois' who assisted in founding the guild of journeymen skinners of Paris in 1394;¹⁴⁵ the no fewer than 65 per cent of non-tailor members of the London tailors' fraternity of St John the Baptist in the mid-fifteenth century;¹⁴⁶ and the class of 'love brethren', practitioners of other crafts admitted to the Coventry weavers' guild of St Osburga at the end of the Middle Ages.¹⁴⁷ The term used in this last instance for the wider ring of members in the craft fraternity conveys the sense of a deliberately cultivated friendship network, through which the craftsmen might hope to establish a variety of working or commercial relationships.

There were also occasions when the prevalent influence on behaviour was the perception of an antagonistic class relationship. This attitude again prompted the formation of more or less unofficial clubs, capable of representing the interests of disadvantaged workers. In particular, a local context of labour shortage, such as often occurred in the later Middle Ages, could crystallize a shared sense of class hostility among hired workers towards employers who were reluctant to adjust wages upwards. Much hostile legislation cites the 'conspiracies, confederacies, and sworn associations' through which dependent labour was alleged to coordinate its campaigns. Allowing for an element of hysteria in the charge, there is no reason to doubt that such societies—whether they called themselves fraternities, brotherhoods, guilds, or drinking-clubs—were a common feature of journeymen's lives, nor that they could be influential.¹⁴⁸ While the more narrowly defined drinking clubs tended to exclude all but male journeymen, the commoner form of social

¹⁴⁴ *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Fifteenth Report, Appendix, Part X* (London, 1899), 117–19; *Coventry Leet Book*, ed. Harris, 656, 687, 694, 792; *The Victoria History of the County of Warwickshire*, ii (London, 1908), 154–5.

¹⁴⁵ Levasseur, *Histoire des classes ouvrières*, i, 599 n., and see also p. 577. For a similar example of the cultivation of neighbourhood ties by the Arras sawyers, see Espinas, *Origines du droit d'association*, i, 72–3.

¹⁴⁶ Davies and Saunders, *History of the Merchant Taylors' Company*, 20.

¹⁴⁷ Coventry, City Record Office, MS 100/17/1: Weavers 11, Weavers' account book, 1523–1635, fols 2 ff.: annual receipts from the 'love brethren', many of whom are specifically described as practising crafts other than weaving, are distinguished in these accounts from the quarterages of the professional members. See also pp. 144–5 in the present study.

¹⁴⁸ e.g. Hauser, *Ouvriers du temps passé*, 166–8; Levasseur, *Histoire des classes ouvrières*, i, 599.

and religious fraternity, as has been noted, included not only journeymen, but also apprentices and working women.¹⁴⁹ To these oppressed groups, the clubs offered not only the attractions of both respectable conviviality and intercessory prayers after death, but also an otherwise unthinkable political voice. Official craft rules allude repeatedly to the pressures brought to bear on workshop managers by journeymen seeking higher wages or reduced working hours (creating freedom for the labourer to work on his own account). In Flemish towns in the thirteenth century, salary scales were fixed after discussions between the various interest groups. Thus, at Douai in 1229, following a strike by some of the tailors, wage levels were agreed by meetings at which were represented 'all the chief officers of the craft, all the guardians of the goods of the trade, all the merchant clothiers and all the tailors, both masters and journeymen'.¹⁵⁰ At Bruges in the same period, artisans in the cloth industry met with drapers to negotiate similar accords.¹⁵¹ The typical forms of the clubs in which the wage-labourers associated and formulated their demands are outlined in the general ban issued by the Florentine city commune in the 1320s. The ban was directed at 'persons of any craft, and in particular that of wool-working, within which a variety of people of different conditions and status are separately employed'. All were forbidden 'to make constitutions or statutes . . . within the guise of a fraternity or otherwise, and under the pretext or cover of religion, or of providing for funerals or religious offerings, or for any other purpose . . . except by special licence of the consuls of that [officially organized] craft under whose authority they stand . . . And they are disallowed from having or carrying any banner.' The context which gave rise to this order, and to the behaviour which had provoked it, was a decade of local food shortages and consequently accentuated social tensions within the city.¹⁵² Similarly, at Venice in 1377, an influx of migrant clothworkers stimulated the drapers' company (which, like its equivalent at Florence, was officially responsible for the entire industry) to outlaw public meetings of more than seven workers, in order 'to avoid the many questions, quarrels and disputes that occur daily'.¹⁵³ Again, when the city council of Freiburg in 1365 heard the complaint of the craft (*Zunft*) of master clothworkers that the journeymen weavers and wool-beaters were maintaining common funds and holding subversive meetings (*Einunge*) under the cloak of religious fraternities, the journeymen's answer was candid and plausible enough, and may stand for many others. They said that they had collected

¹⁴⁹ Wiesner, 'Wandervogels and women'; Reininghaus, *Die Entstehung*, 214; Schulz, *Handwerksgelesen und Lohnarbeiter*, 189.

¹⁵⁰ ' . . . tout li eschevin et tout li eswardeur de la marchandise et tout li marchand et tout li tondeur, maistre et vallet': C. Wyffels, 'Les corporations flamandes et l'origine des communautés de métiers', *Revue du Nord*, 32 (1950), 193–205, at p. 200.

¹⁵¹ Blockmans and Prevenier, *Burgundian Netherlands*, 164.

¹⁵² Doren, *Le arti fiorentine*, i. 208.

¹⁵³ Romano, *Patricians and Popolani*, 72–3.

money to help the families of poor journeymen and that they were concerned to press for higher wages.¹⁵⁴

In England, while such movements are documented from an earlier period, the demographic crisis of the fourteenth century intensified anxiety of this kind, as labour became more scarce and increased in value.¹⁵⁵ Groups of servants and other craftsmen repeatedly demonstrated themselves to be capable of coordinating strikes and other forms of protest, as the occasion demanded. Agreements to fix wages at higher levels were reached among servants in the London carpenters' and cordwainers' trades in 1339, the bakers' in 1349, the brewers' in 1350, and the fullers' in 1363–4; in 1355 eight Flemish weavers in London pleaded guilty to a charge of a similar conspiracy.¹⁵⁶ Hiring-places were natural breeding-grounds of collective action, enabling a London tiler in 1299, having parted acrimoniously with his employer, to urge his fellow-craftsmen in Smithfield to boycott this person in future.¹⁵⁷ In 1304 the fruit-sellers of the same city, urged on by one who asserted that they were 'all poor and captives of their own simplicity', held a meeting to agree a common stand against the wholesalers, to force down prices. Copies of the gospels were brought in order that the plan should be sealed by a solemn oath.¹⁵⁸ In all of these and many other cases, there is no evidence of intention to form permanent organizations; nevertheless, the power of such ad hoc associations is evident, if only in the shrill hostility of the response. And all were, or had close affinities with, fraternities.

CONCLUSION

The urban artisan of the later Middle Ages knew to an intense degree the fragility of the human condition. Even more than in other times and places, a sense of insecurity was normal. To an unprecedented degree, young men and women, leaving their families and their neighbours of generations, took to the roads in the hope of making their careers in the towns. Whether the urban environment was experienced by these migrants as a brave new world of opportunity or as an alienating inferno, the reality of life in the cities urgently required the construction of positive relationships with others, if the individual were to avoid the fate of the sad multitude who, for lack of supportive

¹⁵⁴ Reininghaus, *Die Entstehung*, 59–60.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *Memorials of London*, ed. Riley, 480, 495, 542.

¹⁵⁶ *Cal. Plea and Mem. Rolls*, 1323–64, pp. 108, 225–6, 231–2, 235, 248–9; *Cal. Letter-Book G*, pp. 159–60.

¹⁵⁷ *Calendar of Early Mayor's Court Rolls Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall A.D. 1298–1307*, ed. A. H. Thomas (Cambridge, 1924), 40–1.

¹⁵⁸ *Cal. Early Mayor's Court Rolls*, pp. 157–8.

networks, were condemned to the vulnerable condition of the friendless poor. The fortunate might find an initial point of contact and sympathy with fellow arrivals from the same place of origin; but every newcomer would very soon need to build his or her own alliances in order to gain wider acceptance and the possibility of a living in the city. The relative lack (by contrast with the modern Western city) of formalized structures and legal protection put a particular premium on the creation of trust. Only the credit-worthy would stand a chance of obtaining the premises, tools, materials, co-workers, and customers, without which and whom survival would be impossible. A basis for that mutual trust was continuously in process of construction within the guilds, whose ethic, even as it condemned those excluded by its moral criteria, offered to the willing participant the chance to build new personal relationships with others and so to win respect. For many, the embrace of new brothers and sisters at the moment of initiation to a fraternity was the crucial opening up to the alien outsider which could immunize the individual and so give him or her the strength to consolidate a particular identity in this urban world.

To consider the publicly sanctioned crafts of senior master craftsmen as the sole form of organized labour, and their statutes as though published in a rhetorical void rather than as part of an ongoing debate, is to gain a distorted picture. Instead, they should be viewed as elements within the larger and complex processes whereby individual workers sought credit-worthy status in the community, varied yet reliable working alliances with both masters and dependent labourers in a range of related crafts, and patrons and customers throughout urban society. Strategies for the successful negotiation of these working relationships included the judicious choice of marriage partners and engagement in various networks of clientage. But there was often no more effective means to advance these ends than to subscribe to a fraternity. The evidence reviewed in this chapter has indicated that the terms on which work was undertaken were often determined by the interaction of various pressure groups, of which an official craft organization might be one, but only one among several. In the light of such evidence, the understanding of work in medieval industry is likely to be furthered less by the classification of supposed 'structures' and 'hierarchies' of labour than by sensitive reading of the *processes* whereby agreements were reached in particular periods and places. Within those processes, working men and women were motivated by perceived needs for access to financial credit, to primary materials, to hired labour, and to the market. The pursuit of these goals entailed the building of human relationships which often cut across horizontal social and economic distinctions. The basis of cohesion, so far as this could exist in the world of medieval urban labour, lay less in social homogeneity than in the creation of trust. For all its risks, trust was so far valued by workers in medieval towns that they took trouble to nurture it—and of the social and moral agencies recruited to facilitate this process, the most favoured was the fraternity.



Fig. 7 Culham Bridge, Abingdon, built by the guild of the Holy Cross from 1416.
Photo: Author.

Community

'Now, say, would it be worse for man on earth were he no citizen?'

'Yes', I replied, 'and here I seek no reason.'

Dante, *Paradiso*, viii.115–16

THE BURDEN OF WORLDLY OFFICE

In the heavenly circle of Venus, whose inhabiting spirits are moved in their dance, like all the blessed in heaven, by the power of divine love, the figure of Dante is addressed by the spirit of Charles Martel. The Angevin prince's question has momentous significance for the poet's vision of life in the world of mortal men. The problem of being in the world if one were not a 'citizen' ('se non fosse cive') is not seen here as confined to the Italian city-states in which this was a technical status attaching to family and property. The implication of the question is universal: in a human society whose variety is such, as Charles goes on to say, alluding to Aristotle, that all of its members must have diverse responsibilities ('si vive diversamente per diversi offici'), to be fully alive is necessarily to play an active part in society by undertaking some 'office'.¹ Surrounded by the choreographed and musical harmonies of paradise, the character of Dante (and Dante's reader) is prompted to consider an ideal vision of life on earth as a dance in which each member interacts with others in a figure that, taken all in all, is far greater than the sum of its parts. Similarly in his earlier book, *Monarchy*, Dante had identified mortal man's highest faculty as his potential for intellectual understanding; yet he saw the task of actualizing the total human capacity for comprehending the world, the 'potential intellect', as beyond the resources of any individual or group, but one which called for the participation of every member of mankind in a collaborative project:

¹ Dante, *Paradiso*, viii.115–19.

since that potentiality cannot be fully actualized all at once in any one individual or in any [household, or small community, or city, or individual kingdom], there must needs be a vast number of individual people in the human race, through whom the whole of this potentiality can be actualized.²

Dante here understood the 'possible intellect' to be an impersonal, common ground of thought, possessed by no one, realized and shared in common, and available to all. This belief in the common ownership of thought was derived, by Dante and by others, from the commentary on Aristotle by the twelfth-century Arab philosopher, Averroes. The official view of the Christian Church, however, which was vigorously asserted against Averroes by Thomas Aquinas, could not countenance such a separation between the individual and what were understood to be *his* thoughts, necessary as these were in this religious context to the construction of a personal path of moral salvation. Dante was therefore impelled subsequently to correct his formulation.³ Yet although in the *Comedy* he embraced the teaching that thought was personal, it is clear that Dante, with other orthodox Christians of his time, retained a model of the world united by the complementary roles or 'offices' undertaken by its multifarious human occupants.⁴ The same ideal model of human society as a body comprising diverse human 'limbs', each of whom fulfilled his or her respective 'office' under Christ as the head of all, had been described in the first third of the thirteenth century by Jacques de Vitry.⁵ The fulfilment of this ideal of mutuality is expressed in Dante's vision of paradise by one of the blessed, who explains that God's various disposition of the spirits within the heavenly hierarchy is understood by the souls themselves as perfect harmony: 'his will is our peace.'⁶

In Dante's expression, through the words of Charles Martel, to live fully in the world is to accept an 'office' within it. The term conveys the sense of an active responsibility. In the account of the world which he presented both here and in the *Comedy* as a whole, Dante envisaged each diverse human role as a specific, God-given potential, which the individual was called upon to fulfil through the course of his or her life. In the decades around 1300, this understanding of the purpose of human life in the world gained wide

² Dante, *Monarchy*, I.3–4, ed. and transl. Prue Shaw (Cambridge, 1995), 8–11.

³ Ferdinand van Steenbergen, *Thomas Aquinas and Radical Aristotelianism* (Washington, 1980), 29–74; Cesare Vasoli, 'Averroè', in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 2nd edn (Milan, 2005), vi. 23–33. Dante's auto-correction comes in *Purgatorio*, xxv.62–3.

⁴ See Patrick Boyd, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos* (Cambridge, 1981), 265–9.

⁵ Jacques de Vitry, *Libri duo, quorum prior orientalis sive Hierosolymitanae alter occidentalis historiae nomine inscribitur*, ed. F. Moschus [1597] (repr. Farnborough, 1971), 357–8: 'quasi ex variis membris a se invicem propriis officiis multifarie differentibus, sub Christo capite, unum corpus ecclesie compingatur . . . '.

⁶ Dante, *Paradiso*, iii.85.

currency. A number of older ideas became intertwined in a thought which was new, at this time, both in its inclusiveness and in its urgency. St Paul had envisaged Christian society in the same terms, as a distribution of offices: 'we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office'.⁷ A secular Roman concept of public service as a duty owed by the citizen to the state had continued to circulate in the early-medieval West, especially in the Mediterranean region in which lawyers persisted in invoking a classical terminology of rights and obligations, but also in the more widespread libraries and schools in which the works of Cicero were copied and used for teaching. In *De officiis*, Cicero denounced those who selfishly opted out of public life, claiming the pressure of their own business: 'they are traitors to social life, for they contribute to it none of their interest, none of their effort, none of their means'.⁸ The Latin translation of Aristotle's *Politics* around 1260 reinforced the Roman's positive view of public life. The premise that 'man is by nature a political animal' would resonate outwards from the schools, and would be echoed in Dante's own insistence on the vital necessity of social interaction for the fulfilment of human potential.⁹ Despite the mutual resonance of these pre-Christian and Pauline ideas, it was not a simple matter to reconcile the classical conviction of the value of the political community in its own right with the Christian goal of communion with God. The argument of Augustine's *City of God* was clear in its deprecation of all human systems of social organization as no more than means to limit the damage caused by sin; the only valid and enduring city was in heaven.¹⁰ By a significant turn of religious thought, however, the thirteenth century witnessed the emergence of more positive Christian ideas about the potential for social virtue which, although still disinclined to ascribe more than secondary importance to secular politics, were to develop a new *modus vivendi* with the ordering of human affairs in the world. In this shift in Christian thinking, two elements stand out. The first was a novel perspective on man as part of divinely created nature. The absorption of Aristotelian natural science by Roger Bacon, Thomas Aquinas, and others contributed to a new conviction of the virtue

⁷ Rom. 12.4–8.

⁸ Cicero, *De officiis*, transl. Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA, 1913), 31 (I.9.29). On the medieval currency of Ciceronian ideas about public life, see Hans Baron, *Cicero and the Roman Civic Spirit in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (Manchester, 1938).

⁹ On the spread of Aristotelian political ideas in the West from the thirteenth century, see Jean Dunbabin, 'The reception and interpretation of Aristotle's *Politics*', in Norman Kretzman, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg, eds, *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600* (Cambridge, 1982), 723–37; Cary J. Nederman, 'The meaning of "Aristotelianism" in medieval moral and political thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57 (1996), 563–85.

¹⁰ See Matthew S. Kempshall, *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, 1999); Mary M. Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good* (Cambridge, 2006).

of nature itself and of the moral purpose of human life in the world. The second crucial development was the pastoral initiative of a Church which, as it emerged from the Reform of the twelfth century, turned itself decisively outwards in an embrace directed to the world at large. A fruit of these developments were clerical sermons in which lay audiences were urged to consider Christianity, not as a mere set of beliefs and rules, but as an invitation to realize to the full the potential for virtuous living in society with which each person had been endowed.

The Christian call to a life of action was founded not on a Ciceronian belief in the intrinsic virtue of the secular state, but on a sense of what was due to God in return for the gift of creation. A scriptural point of reference for preachers on the theme was the parable of the talents with which a lord entrusted his servants.¹¹ The servant who, cautiously burying his single talent, was able to return only this to his master, when called to account, was condemned. Those who earned praise had used their gifts in such a way that they could return them twofold. In other and later contexts, this story would be invoked in discussion of the practice of usury; but its far wider application was exemplified in a sermon delivered in the 1250s to mixed lay congregations by the Franciscan Berthold of Regensburg.¹² Berthold's message, which he elaborated around the parable of the talents, was that each man and woman had received a specific and personal office ('amt'), whether this were to preach, to make shoes, or to be a duchess. The Franciscan explicitly lamented the inequality in human society which had resulted from sin, and insisted forcefully that those with larger endowments were to be expected to contribute correspondingly more to the assistance of others. But his principal argument was that each Christian was summoned, in the fulfilment of his or her respective office, to return to God a surplus equivalent to a doubling of the gift received. The gift Berthold broke down into several elements: the person, the office itself, worldly goods, time, and other people ('your neighbour'). Of all of these the individual was no more than a steward, and the expectation implicit in the grant was that, prior to its return to God at the day of account, it should be doubly enhanced in value by diverse acts of human charity. To clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to support one another in any way which entailed self-sacrifice, was to do these things to God.¹³

¹¹ Matt. 25.14–30.

¹² Berthold von Regensburg, *Vollständiger Ausgabe seiner Predigten*, ed. F. Pfeiffer and J. Strobl (Vienna, 1862–80), i. 11–28. This sermon has been discussed in a different context by Aaron Gurevich, 'The "sociology" and "anthropology" of Berthold von Regensburg', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 4 (1991), 112–20; and Gurevich, *The Origins of European Individualism*, transl. Katharine Judelson (Oxford, 1995), 156–75.

¹³ Berthold von Regensburg, ed. Pfeiffer and Strobl, i. 27–8.

COMMUNITY AS A DEBT

This was an argument for social virtue rooted in a conception of a shared human debt. The same idea lies at the etymological core of the word ‘community’: the joint (*cum*) undertaking of a burden or responsibility (*munus*).¹⁴ In this perspective, community is not a particular body or place; not the membership of an exclusive association or the population of a bounded territory. Hard as it is to conceive of community without objectifying it in a definite form, on this understanding it is not a specific presence but a common absence. The absence is an acknowledged, unpaid debt, a sense of guilt or obligation, which requires all human beings to make a propitiatory sacrifice. While the particular understanding of this obligation has varied between societies, and has taken both religious and secular forms, the conviction that mankind is united by being born into a common burden of debt appears to be found in all cultures. The belief is always tied to a myth of origin, such as a ‘state of nature’ from which the world has fallen away, or, as in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, an un-repayable act of creation. It is in order to honour this debt that each person is called, alongside others, to move outside the scope of merely selfish interest and to take up his or her burden.

It was to this concept of shared obligation that the rhetoric of community in the medieval guilds was primarily addressed. All of the ethical imperatives of the fraternities reviewed in Chapter 2 fall into this category, being various ways in which individual members might assume their particular share of a common responsibility for the injustice, violence, and poverty which distanced humanity from its divine creator. As was noted in the same chapter, the potential for lay Christians to make a material contribution to the common debt of humanity, consequent upon the sin of Adam, was understood in significantly more inclusive and positive terms after the twelfth century than before. The *munus* was there for all, in equal measure; but it was for the individual to recognize it, to shoulder it, and in doing so to give up something of his or her independence and autonomy. To participate in the common project was to allow oneself to be decentred. Again, the ethical practices of the guilds which were also considered in Chapter 2 were cultivated with this aim in view, taking account of a necessary balance between the opening out of the individual to others and the immunization of the self against the danger of complete absorption by the vastness of the collective obligation. Whether or not to step up to the challenge was, crucially, a matter of personal choice: as has been emphasized throughout all the preceding chapters, both the moral value and the social credit which attached to guild membership were derived from its voluntary basis. These were the principles of community which were

¹⁴ Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* [1998], transl. Timothy Campbell (Stanford, CA, 2010), 4–6.

crystallized in the works of the guilds but which were confined neither to these organizations in general nor to specific cases.

As, over time, it acquired increasing bureaucratic definition and material stability, the officers of a particular fraternity would tend to fall into the habit of referring to the association itself as 'the community of the guild'. Seen in this perspective—reified, objectified, and institutionalized—the guild 'community' was a closed body, bound to its particular territorial and social nexus. Thus materialized, the inclusive idea became narrowed to the particular group, within which it had the paradoxical potential, by its exclusionary aspect, of reinforcing division. In the eyes of both members and observers, this could frequently be the dominant manifestation of a guild. Nevertheless, the larger understanding of 'community', in the name of which the guilds in general were founded, remained as a Christian ideal, the invocation of which transcended the particular bounds of company and place.

On this understanding, the community of the medieval guilds consisted neither in their social nor in their territorial definition, but in their members' shared sense of a collective responsibility. To place the guilds in this light is to distance them from a long tradition of writing on 'communities' which has identified the latter with particular places supposedly characterized by long-term social stability. Much of that literature on the community of place, from William Cobbett to Robert Putnam, has been open to the criticism that it is idealized, romanticized, and falsified by historical experience.¹⁵ By contrast, the model of community as shared obligation is not bound to locality, nor does it carry the nostalgic, anti-modernist baggage borne by the majority of 'community studies'. The idea of community as a recognized common burden is identified here both as a methodological concept which can help to analyse and explain the medieval guilds, and as a descriptive account of the fraternities as a substantive social and moral phenomenon.

This model of community, both as a theoretical concept and as a lived historical experience, has potential for comparative application in social, political, and technological environments very different from that of late-medieval England. In the early twenty-first century, global telecommunications systems,

¹⁵ By the 1990s, the use of the term by historians of the later Middle Ages drew the criticism that this was an idealistic projection unsupported by evidence. Miri Rubin, 'Small groups: identity and solidarity in the late Middle Ages', in Jenny Kermode, ed., *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England* (Dover, NH, 1991), 132–50; Christine Carpenter, 'Gentry and community in medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), 340–80. For scepticism about communities, conventionally understood, see also R. M. Smith, '“Modernisation” and the corporate medieval village community in England: some sceptical reflections', in A. R. H. Baker and D. Gregory, eds, *Explorations in Historical Geography: Interpretative Essays* (Cambridge, 1984), 140–79; Christopher Dyer, 'Taxation and communities in late medieval England', in Richard Britnell and John Hatcher, eds, *Progress and Problems in Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Edward Miller* (Cambridge, 1996), 168–90.

from the Internet to Twitter, are changing the relationship of individuals to neighbourhoods and reconfiguring the significance of face-to-face contacts. Some observers of these developments have drawn radical conclusions, announcing 'the death of distance', or proclaiming a new democracy of the mobile phone. We should be wary, however, of the claim that particular technological innovations have, by themselves, brought into being a wholly new era of human relations. In their time and context, the medieval guilds tended, as has been seen, to be relatively restricted in their geographical scope, which enabled them to bring most of their members regularly together in one place. But the idea of collective responsibility which connected the members was not necessarily so delimited. It has been convincingly argued that those who never meet but open the same newspaper each morning may be said to be linked by common concerns.¹⁶ By a similar argument, it may be proposed that the adoption in the modern world of a common moral stand on human rights by scattered and diverse individuals who are interlinked by the World Wide Web is the practical acknowledgment of a sense of responsible community analogous to that which gave rise to the medieval guilds.

COMMON GOODS

Community, therefore, can show a local and particular face, but its fuller meaning is inclusive. The tendency for the organization to crystallize into a body distinguished by the designation of a 'community' in its own particular right was in the Middle Ages especially marked in cases where a fraternity became virtually identified with a specific settlement. In certain French villages, in parts of the countryside where other structures of secular administration were relatively weak, a pattern emerged in which a confraternity of the Holy Spirit would represent the community of inhabitants.¹⁷ In England it was rather in the context of small towns that a single fraternity would commonly rise to political prominence as the vehicle for practical policies and a political identity which were otherwise lacking or were actively resisted by secular or

¹⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edn (London, 1991).

¹⁷ Pierre Duparc, 'Confréries du Saint-Esprit et communautés d'habitants au moyen-âge', *Revue historique de droit français et étranger*, 4th series, 36 (1958), 349–67; F. Bernard, 'Les confréries communales du Saint-Esprit: leur lieux de réunion et leurs activités du Xe au XXe siècle', *Mémoires de l'Académie des Sciences, Belles-Lettres et Arts de Savoie*, 6th series, 7 (1963), 16–79. An urban example, closer to the English cases discussed in this chapter, was the Holy Spirit confraternity of Marseille: P. Amargier, 'Mouvements populaires et confrérie du Saint-Esprit à Marseille au seuil du XIIIe siècle', *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*, 11 (1976), 305–19.

ecclesiastical lords.¹⁸ At the same time, the vision and the practical scope of a guild of this kind were often the fullest late-medieval instantiation of community in the wider, inclusive sense. Instances of this phenomenon in all its aspects are the guild of St Mary and the Holy Cross guild of Abingdon. The site of an Anglo-Saxon settlement at a ford across the Thames and of an early church dedicated to St Helen, Abingdon in the later Middle Ages played a prominent role in the economy of the region and as an entrepôt between the Thames valley and London. Yet the inhabitants enjoyed no rights of self-government, being subject to the jurisdiction and the taxes of the Benedictine abbey whose massive stone buildings loomed over the market-place. The abbey, founded with crown patronage in the mid-tenth century by the learned Ethelwold, enjoyed at that time its greatest period of cultural distinction; but its strategic location secured it continuing royal favour, and the monastic community remained until its dissolution in 1538 a powerful political and economic force in the region and legally the sole authority over the small town which clustered at its gates. However, an alternative forum for communal and civic identity was created in a pair of guilds, respectively of the Virgin Mary and of the Holy Cross, based in the ancient parish church of St Helen at the opposite end of the town from the abbey. The latter guild is first documented in the late fourteenth century but was probably of much greater antiquity. The dedication was a natural one in the context of a cult of St Helen, the finder of the Cross of Christ. A later recorded tradition held that St Helen's church housed the 'black cross of Abingdon', a venerated testimony of early Christians who came there from the Holy Land during the fourth-century persecution of the Emperor Julian.¹⁹ A guild of St Mary was in existence in the church by the 1240s, and it is likely that the two fraternities of the Cross, focused respectively on the Passion of Christ and on the intercession of the Virgin, complemented one another from an early date.²⁰ The guild of the Holy Cross, in particular, came during the later Middle Ages to channel a great diversity of aspirations for the local population. In the guild, the inhabitants of Abingdon created a source of moral authority which enabled them both to articulate an ideal of independence from clerical control and to realize a series of ambitious public projects. These developments acquire particular significance in the context of a long history of political tensions with the abbey.

¹⁸ The theme was outlined in Gervase Rosser, 'Big Brotherhood: guilds in urban politics in late medieval England', in Ian Gadd and Patrick Wallis, eds, *Guilds and Association in Europe, 900–1900* (London, 2006), 27–42.

¹⁹ Antony Wood, *Survey of the Antiquities of the City of Oxford* [1661–6], ed. Andrew Clark, 3 vols, Oxford Historical Society, xv, xvii, xxxvii (1889–99), ii, 489.

²⁰ Abingdon, Oxfordshire [prior to 1974, Berkshire], Christ's Hospital, MSS 11, 17, 47 (with the seal of the guild of St Mary), for the existence in the thirteenth century of the Marian brotherhood.

The pattern of conflict with the monastic overlords went back at least to the twelfth century.²¹ The most sensational expression of resistance to monastic tutelage, however, occurred in 1327, during a period of widespread social tensions worsened by disastrous harvests. In the surviving account of the dramatic assault on the monastery in this year, the Holy Cross guild is not mentioned; but it may be significant that the rising was orchestrated towards the end of April, in the days running up to what would have been the guild feast of St Helen's Finding of the True Cross on 3 May, and it is notable that similar bids for urban liberties were orchestrated at the same period by the inhabitants of other monastic boroughs through the agency of a guild. At Bury St Edmunds in the same year of 1327, and at Cirencester in 1342, violent assaults on the local Benedictine communities were orchestrated by guilds.²² These were convened and led in each case by prosperous merchants, whose communitarian ideals stretched only so far as suited their desire to be relieved of the monastic yoke. But these risings drew into their orbit a larger communal involvement and with it the potential for a more inclusive sense of identification with the proclaimed ideals of greater justice and lay empowerment.

It was on the morning of 20 April that the commons of Abingdon ('all but the old people', according to the contemporary chronicle of the abbey) first gathered, at the ringing of the church bell, in the nave of St Helen's church. At midnight on 22 April a further meeting in the church was followed by an attack on the market hall, recently erected by the monks for the control of the market-place. The aim was to remove the market to a site closer to St Helen's and out of the jurisdiction of the convent. The building was destroyed, but the attackers were then forced by defenders of the abbey to disperse. On 26 April a further midnight assembly was held, this time swollen by the arrival of a large band of townspeople and students from Oxford, who had been invited to assist in the revolt. The abbey itself was now broken into, whereupon prisoners taken during the previous clash were released from the abbot's gaol; some of the monks were physically attacked in their church, while most escaped by fleeing across the river; the legal records of the monastery were burned, and its treasures were carried away. Calling a truce, the attackers the next day summoned representatives of the convent to a parley in Bagley Wood, at which the monks, in no position to argue, made great concessions. However, the abbot meanwhile made his way to the king, with whose support the old

²¹ *Chronicon monasterii de Abingdon*, ed. Joseph Stevenson, 2 vols, Rolls Series (London, 1858), ii, pp. lxxiii–lxxx, 228–9; see also Martin Biddle et al., 'The early history of Abingdon, Berkshire, and its abbey', *Medieval Archaeology*, 12 (1968), 26–69.

²² M. D. Lobel, *The Borough of Bury St Edmund's: A Study in the Government and Development of a Monastic Town* (Oxford 1935), 142–7; E. A. Fuller, 'Cirencester: the manor and the town', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 9 (1884–5), 298–344; *The Cartulary of Cirencester Abbey*, ed. C. D. Ross, 2 vols (London, 1964), i, pp. xxxvi–xl.

order was firmly reinforced. The sheriff tried and hanged a dozen of the rebels, *pour encourager les autres*, and Abingdon returned to its status of subjection.²³

Abingdon is not known to have seen disturbances during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, as did some other monastic boroughs,²⁴ but during the 1390s tensions between the town and the abbey again reached a crisis point, this time focused on rights of burial. Although St Helen's had the greater antiquity, the only licensed burial ground for the lay population was within the confines of the abbey. In 1391, the townspeople successfully petitioned the pope for permission to have a new cemetery, urging *inter alia* that under the existing regime, a body was sometimes kept waiting by the monks for three days before burial, that the office of the dead was not always celebrated, and that pigs were sometimes allowed to dig up the graves. But when two people who had died just outside Abingdon were being brought to burial in the new graveyard beside the church of St Helen, the monks forcibly diverted the funeral procession into the convent. The abbot launched a legal campaign through the pope and the king, which led in 1396 to the closure of the new cemetery. The bodies of sixty-seven people were forcibly exhumed, to be reburied at the abbey. The custody of the town's ancestors remained in the hands of the monks.²⁵ The jealous restriction of responsibility on the part of established authority left many of the local laity feeling infantilized and frustrated.

In 1391, however, the townspeople had additionally obtained from the pope an indulgence to encourage pilgrims to visit their ancient church of St Helen.²⁶ The particular motivation of this expedient was to raise funds for a magnificent decorative programme which was as eloquent as any armed protest of the desire of the lay population to take responsibility for its own salvation in this world and the next. The guild of St Mary, which managed the affairs of the church in the manner of churchwardens, was evidently the coordinator of this project. The Lady chapel at the east end of the Virgin's aisle, which was used by the guild of St Mary for its particular services, was now endowed with a spectacular painted ceiling, depicting the Tree of Jesse as a series of thirty-eight standing kings and prophets of the Old Testament, reaching its climax in paired images of the Virgin Mary and of Christ on the Cross. The style of the paintings and the cut of their robes date the work to the end of the fourteenth century. Notwithstanding the jealous resistance of the Benedictines, this spectacular representation of the unfolding of divine history, framing as it

²³ H. E. Salter, 'A chronicle roll of the abbots of Abingdon', *English Historical Review*, 26 (1911), 727–38; *The Victoria History of the County of Berkshire*, iv (London, 1924), 438–9.

²⁴ Including Bury St Edmunds: Lobel, *Borough of Bury St Edmunds*, 151–5.

²⁵ A. E. Preston, *Christ's Hospital Abingdon* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1931), 8–11, 75; *Calendar of Papal Letters, 1362–1404*, p. 371.

²⁶ *Calendar of Papal Letters, 1362–1404*, p. 407; Reading, Berkshire Record Office, MS D/Ex.133/Z/1: Papal indulgence granted to visitors to St Helen's church, Abingdon, 5 November 1391.

did the assemblies of the guild of Our Lady, declared that the townspeople could form a sacred community no less valid than that of the monastery itself. Above the panels is inscribed a prayer which cites the indulgence of Pope Boniface IX for benefactors and the invocation, in the name of all who had contributed to the work: 'O Virgin, star of the sea, may you lead those who made this chapel to the sweetness of heaven after the troubles of the world.'²⁷

Against this background, the emergence in the historical record of the guild of the Holy Cross acquires its importance. Records from the middle and later part of the fourteenth century show the guild to be in possession of considerable estates and rents, which strongly suggest that its territorial base had been built up over a significant period prior to this time.²⁸ In the early fifteenth century, those living in the small town and its hinterland, acting through this fraternity, were able to undertake the substantial rebuilding and decoration of the aisle in the church, known as St Helen's aisle, which was used for joint assemblies of the guild and of the townspeople at large, and which was thus a secular focus for the population.²⁹ A room over the north porch of the church was used by the guild for its council meetings and was known as 'the common house' or 'the exchequer'.³⁰ The building close to St Helen's church which was used from 1436 for the annual feast was known as 'the brotherhood house'. The bill for this event gives an indication of the scale and range of the membership of the fraternity: the assembled company regularly consumed six calves, sixteen lambs, eighty capons, and 800 eggs. Minstrels are recorded as coming to the event from Coventry and Maidenhead.³¹ The procession of the guild through the town was a highly visible expression of identity, which in the 1430s provoked episcopal criticism (originating, presumably, in a complaint from the monks) for its inclusion of masked men and for carrying the devil in effigy.³² In a late-medieval population which cannot have exceeded a thousand people, few if any families in the town must have felt untouched by the guild.³³

²⁷ Preston, *Christ's Hospital*, 16–17. The paintings have recently been conserved.

²⁸ James Townsend, *A History of Abingdon* (London, 1910), 52.

²⁹ Salter, 'A chronicle roll', 731 ff.; Townsend, *History of Abingdon*, 59 (erroneously dating the paintings to the mid-15th century but supplying the text of the inscription).

³⁰ Preston, *Christ's Hospital*, 17.

³¹ The authority is Francis Little, *A Monument of Christian Munificence; or, An Account of the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross, and of the Hospital of Christ in Abingdon* [1627] (Oxford, 1872), 20; the original documents are lost. For the brotherhood house see Preston, *Christ's Hospital*, 24.

³² Alexandra F. Johnston and Sally-Beth MacLean, 'Reformation and resistance in Thames/Severn parishes: the dramatic witness', in Katherine L. French, Gary G. Gibbs, and Beat A. Kümin, eds, *The Parish in English Life, 1400–1600* (Manchester, 1997), 178–200, at p. 182.

³³ This is no more than an impressionistic indicator of the size of Abingdon's population. It is based on the evidence that the town was ranked 44th by wealth in England in the royal subsidy assessment of 1334, and below 50th in that of 1524–5. Alan Dyer, *Decline and Growth in English Towns 1400–1640* (London, 1991), 70–1.

In 1441 the guild of the Holy Cross acquired a royal charter, the better to secure its extensive property following a recent act of parliament which tightened the regulation of guilds holding land in perpetuity ('in mortmain') for pious purposes.³⁴ The surviving mid-fifteenth cartulary of the guild runs to some five hundred pages: testimony to a substantial estate.³⁵ The accumulation of houses by the fraternity, which must have largely occurred by bequests from members, was such that by 1497–8, a rental of the guild shows its annual receipts from rents to have been in excess of £57, and by the 1540s this figure had reached £85: sums which endowed the organization with considerable freedom of action.³⁶ A document of 1486–7 records a representative case of a widow in the nearby village of Clifton who, having at first intended to sell her house in order to live in her old age on the proceeds, then petitioned to be able to give the property to the guild in return for a place in its almshouse, the usual allowance of 7*d.* per week, and the prayers of the fraternity for her soul.³⁷ This almshouse was of recent foundation. The charter of 1441 announced the guild's intention to make provision for 'thirteen poor, sick, and impotent men and women'; and in 1446 the society was responsible for the foundation, on land next to St Helen's church which had been acquired at the end of the previous century by the guild of St Mary, of the Long Alley almshouse.³⁸ The implication of these circumstances is that the two guilds coordinated their efforts in this enterprise. Comprising thirteen cottages in a single row with a small common hall at the centre, the almshouse, slightly altered at the beginning of the seventeenth century, survives and serves the same function today, having been re-founded in 1553, after the destruction of the guild, as Christ's Hospital.³⁹ Fragmentary accounts of the guild from the mid-fifteenth century record the brotherhood's agreement that 'no man neither woman from thenceforward be admitted unto the almshouse without assent of the fellowship', that regular payments be made to the residents there, and the names of some of these 'poor people' at the charge of the fraternity, to which they did not previously belong.⁴⁰

It was shortly after the grant of the royal charter in 1441 that the guild of the Holy Cross undertook the construction of a magnificent new cross in the marketplace: a symbol of the fraternity, which served simultaneously to advertise to the world both the religious character and the dignity of the town as a whole. The project also showed the urban population finally taking control of the market area which had for so long been contested with the

³⁴ *Statutes of the Realm*, ii. 298–9 (15 Hen. VI, cap.6).

³⁵ Christ's Hospital, MS 651.

³⁶ Christ's Hospital, MS 821; Little, *A Monument of Christian Munificence*, 32.

³⁷ Christ's Hospital, MS 1033/XIV (the date confirmed by Christ's Hospital, MS deeds 802–4).

³⁸ Preston, *Christ's Hospital*, 8, 15.

³⁹ Preston, *Christ's Hospital*, 26–7.

⁴⁰ Christ's Hospital, MS 651A, 7–8.

monks. The four-storeyed structure, some sixty feet high, bearing statues of prophets, saints, and kings—a microcosm of Christian and national history—so richly decorated with coloured paint and gold leaf that in sunlight it dazzled the beholder's eye, gained such wide renown that when, a century later, the citizens of Coventry determined to build the finest cross in the country, they stipulated that it should be an imitation of that at Abingdon.⁴¹ Although some wealthy contributors added their coats of arms to the structure, the Abingdon cross was an expression of a more inclusive sense of community under the sign of the Cross of Christ.

The greatest of all the public undertakings of the Holy Cross guild of Abingdon was the construction of a double stone bridge and intervening causeway across a wide bend of the neighbouring river Thames (Fig. 7).⁴² These bridges had both enormous economic and symbolic significance. Replacing as they did an existing structure of stone or more probably of wood at Abingdon, and at nearby Culham a wide and hazardous ford, where all travellers had previously been made to pay a toll, they gave free passage to pilgrims and merchants and, like all new bridges erected in the Middle Ages, were perceived primarily as a collective work of charity.⁴³ At the same time, their economic function was to divert trade to the town. In this aim they were extremely successful, to judge by the reaction of the inhabitants of Wallingford, the county town, who petitioned the crown with an outraged complaint, declaring themselves ruined by the diversion through Abingdon of commercial and much other traffic between the West Midlands and London. Redounding both to the material advantage and to the prestige of all in Abingdon, the work of constructing the bridges, led and orchestrated by the Holy Cross guild, became a collaborative project which inspired and engaged the practical support of a wide cross-section of the local population. The royal licence to build the bridges was granted in 1416 to 'the commons of Abingdon', represented by John Hutchins and John Bright; from 1417 the former kept the account book of the guild for the management of the bridge funds. Permission was granted to raise the necessary contributions through alms and the benevolence of donors.⁴⁴ In 1418 a substantial quantity of properties belonging to the Holy Cross guild was transferred to trustees, evidently to

⁴¹ M. J. H. Liversidge, 'Abingdon's "right goodly cross of stone"', *Antiquaries Journal*, 63 (1983), 315–25.

⁴² Abingdon, Christ's Hospital, MS 651A, accounts of the guild of the Holy Cross, fifteenth-century; Little, *A Monument of Christian Munificence*, 2–12; Townsend, *History of Abingdon*, 51–7 (repeating Little); Preston, *Christ's Hospital*.

⁴³ David Harrison, *The Bridges of Medieval England: Transport and Society, 400–1800* (Oxford, 2004), 194, 198; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven and London, 1992), 367–8.

⁴⁴ A copy of the royal letters patent for the bridge, dated 23 June 1416, is in Christ's Hospital, MS 456. The Holy Cross guild account book of John Howchyn for the years 1417–24 is Christ's Hospital, MS 651B. The book is scrappy and unclear, but references to the purchase of stone and

create a stable fund for the building operation.⁴⁵ In 1421 the king approved a further petition from the townspeople that their new bridges should be free of toll, and with additional royal support (a charter of 1441, the year of the guild's own royal licence, permitted the acquisition for the support of the bridges of additional lands worth £40 a year) the works, including the improvement of the roadway between the Abingdon bridges and Dorchester-on-Thames, continued through the middle decades of the fifteenth century.⁴⁶ In 1457–8 a member of the guild and an eyewitness of this great enterprise, a local ironmonger named Richard Formande, wrote a poetic tribute to the project, a copy of which was framed at an early date and has been preserved in the fraternity almshouses. The modest standing of the author as also of his verse only convey the better the contemporary perception of the work as an expression of community in its most inclusive sense.⁴⁷ The celebratory text, on its vellum placard, may have been normally displayed in the chapel of the guild in St Helen's church, and could well have been delivered in performance by its author at the fraternity feast. The poem opens with a tribute to the Church as 'chief of all works in this world', because of its baptism of souls into grace, then directly adds:

Another blessed business is bridges to make,
There that the people may not pass after great showers.
Dole it is to draw a dead body out of a lake,
That was fulfilled in a font stone [*baptised*], and a fellow of ours.

After acknowledging prominent individual patrons of the bridge—John Hutchins who 'laid the first stone in the king's name', the merchant Geoffrey Barbour who contributed a thousand marks, and the local knight Sir Peter Bessil who donated building material from quarries on his estates ('for his father's soul and his friends' he did as he should')—the narrative focuses on

to receipts from John Bright, Hutchins's collaborator on the bridge project, show its relation to the work.

⁴⁵ Christ's Hospital, MS 553.

⁴⁶ Christ's Hospital, MS 491; *Statutes of the Realm*, ii. 211–12 (9 Hen. V, stat. 2, cap. 2); *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1441–1446*, p. 36; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476–1485*, p. 386.

⁴⁷ The poem, in manuscript on vellum (Christ's Hospital, MS 719A), hangs on the wall in the mid-15th-century small central hall of the Long Alley almshouses. The text concludes: 'Richard Formande ironmonger has made this table and set it here in the year of King Henry VI 36th [1457–8]'. The author appears in the guild accounts (Christ's Hospital, MS 651A, pp. 9–10) as 'Richard Iremonger' and as 'Richard Foreman', and was later remembered by the latter name by Little. The text has been printed in Little, *A Monument of Christian Munificence*, 121–4; in *The Itinerary of John Leland*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith, 5 vols (repr. London, 1964), v. 116–18; and by Ralph Hanna, 'The Bridges at Abingdon: an unnoticed alliterative poem', in Michael Calabrese, ed., *Yee? Baw for Bokes: Essays on Medieval Manuscripts and Poetics* (Los Angeles, 2013), 31–44.

the scene at the building site, where skilled professionals were assisted by an army of local people eager to mix their labour with the project:

It was a solace to see in a summer season
 Three hundred I wisse [*estimate*], working at once.
 Four and four, ruled by reason,
 To wit who wrought best, were set for the nonce.
 The people proved their power with the pickaxe;
 The mattock was man-handled right well awhile.
 With spades and shovels they made such a noise
 That men might hear them thence a mile.
 Wives went out to wit how they wrought:
 Five score in a flock, it was a fair sight.
 In board cloths [*table-cloths*] bright white bread they brought,
 Cheese and chickens clearly a-dight.

In conclusion, the elimination of the former toll at Culham hithe was celebrated as a boon to all, and especially to the poor:

Thereto witness all Abingdon, and many one more.
 For now is Culham hithe i-come to an end,
 And all the country the better and no man the worse.
 Few folk there were could that way wend,
 But they waged a wed [*pledged a security*] or paid of their purse.
 And if it were a beggar had bread in his bag,
 He should be right soon i-bid for to go about,
 And of the poor penniless, the hireward [*toll-man*] would have
 A hood or a girdle, and let them go without.
 Many more mischiefs there were, I say.
 Culham hithe has caused many a curse.
 I-blessed be our helpers, we have a better way,
 Without any penny for cart and for horse.

To have participated in such a collective undertaking for the common good, under the aegis of a guild, was evidently remembered by individuals as an act of community, whose tangible benefits reached far beyond the number of those who sacrificed to this end either their money or their labour. The sense of pride in this achievement was expressed by the ironmonger with a measure of localism, which exemplifies the way in which the open community of the guild tended to generate in addition a more restricted idea of 'the community' as embodied in the particular place. As if to illustrate this point, the poem concludes with a rebus on the name of the town:

A.B.I.N.D.O.N.

Take the first letter of your forefather [*Adam*] with A, the worker of wax [*a bee*], and I and N, the colour of an ass [*dun*]; set them together, and tell me if you can what it is then.

But the feeling of civic pride coexisted with, and remained dependent upon, the awareness that the town's inhabitants had contributed to a substantial public project which could be seen as morally virtuous in so far as it was the product of voluntary sacrifice and of benefit to all.

URBAN COMMUNITY

The various public works of the Abingdon guilds were abruptly interrupted by the dissolution of all fraternities and chantries by act of parliament in 1547.⁴⁸ This catastrophe was a rough test, here as in dozens of other towns, of the spirit and purpose which had for some time found their means of expression in the guilds. The act which summarily declared the non-existence of purgatory rendered redundant and even culpable the prayers for the dead to which all of the guilds had devoted a significant part of their resources. But the remaining public purposes which the fraternities had served retained their perceived importance, to the extent that by diverse means, many of these functions resurfaced after the dissolution, to be carried forward in a new guise. This story, which was repeated with variations in many provincial towns, is testimony not only to the ingenuity and diplomacy of a few leading townspeople but also to the strength of a larger public feeling which had previously sustained and continued to support a range of public works, association with which imbued their sponsors, of whatever social standing, with the character of good Christians and worthy citizens. In the case of Abingdon, the partial recovery following the high tide of the Reformation was ensured by the friendship at court of a son of the town, Sir John Mason, a diplomat and member of the privy council who, during an international career, never forgot his place of origin. It was an act of the privy council which in 1553 restored

to the townsmen of Abingdon . . . such lands as, having been appointed for the maintenance of two bridges and the sustenance of certain poor men, were taken lately from them upon colour that the same were within the compass of the act of chantries.⁴⁹

In this year, Christ's Hospital was established in Abingdon, taking over the secular functions, including the almshouse, of the former guild. Four of the last masters of the fraternity were among the governors of the hospital. Three years later, in 1556, the leading residents were successful in their petition to

⁴⁸ Peter Cunich, 'The dissolution of the chantries', in Patrick Collinson and John Craig, eds, *The Reformation in English Towns, 1500–1640* (London, 1998), 159–74.

⁴⁹ *Acts of the Privy Council, 1552–54*, pp. 226–7; P. R. N. Carter, 'Mason, Sir John (c.1503–1566)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

the crown for incorporation as a self-governing town. On this occasion, two of the same four former guild masters became members of the new town council.⁵⁰ A contemporary celebrated in verse the successful recovery in the 1550s of much that had been valued in

the fraternity in honour of the Cross
That, at the end so suppressed, was so great a loss.⁵¹

That not only the material basis but something of the moral feeling formerly invested in the guild had survived the political upheavals and doctrinal changes of this period is suggested by the terms in which the fifteenth-century benefactors of the fraternity and its works were remembered in the early seventeenth century by Francis Little, who served as both master of the hospital and mayor of the town:

Thus charitable and well affected men and women did (as they conceived) good and goodly deeds all to this end and purpose, that piety and charity united and knit together might make a virtuous world, and to shew how divine a beauty Christian goodness hath.⁵²

Nevertheless, the Reformation and the re-foundation of the guild charities as legally constituted corporations and civic councils profoundly altered the moral basis on which these works were conducted. What was lost, in addition to the Catholic belief that the activities of the fraternity benefited the souls of members' ancestors in purgatory, was the sense of full participation which was granted to all members of the former guild, whatever their standing in society. The pre-Reformation guild of the Holy Cross was not lacking in administrative hierarchy: it already had its governing body of a dozen 'seniors'. But the incorporation of the town council, which imposed upon the civic elders extensive responsibilities for which they were answerable to the crown, tended to enshrine a more profound division between those who made policy and the subordinate townspeople whose contributory role was officially confined to the payment of taxes and obedience to the law. The less wealthy brothers and sisters of a medieval guild who contributed in cash, kind, or labour to its various charitable works did not directly determine the policy of these projects or the language in which they were publicly celebrated. But because their personal engagement visibly helped to constitute a prestigious image of sacrifice and service, participation in the fraternity could be experienced by poor and rich alike as a redemptive act.

⁵⁰ Little, *A Monument of Christian Munificence*, 33–45; Preston, *Christ's Hospital*, 26–30; *Victoria History of Berkshire*, iv. 439–40.

⁵¹ William Branch's poetic tribute to the benefactors of the former guild and new hospital is inscribed, in a 16th-century hand, at the beginning of the 15th-century cartulary of the fraternity. Christ's Hospital, MS 651.

⁵² Little, *A Monument of Christian Munificence*, 17.

In a number of other small towns, as at Abingdon, a prominent medieval guild, having been suppressed by the chantries act, would subsequently rise again as an incorporated borough.⁵³ Each instance points to the earlier role of the guild as a surrogate government. When the axe fell on the guilds in 1547, the population of Maidstone in Kent desired to purchase the former property of the guild of Corpus Christi to support a new grammar school in the brotherhood hall, but could not afford the price of £200. Protector Somerset, however, made a pragmatic bargain with the town: the inhabitants might sell off the plate, vestments, and furniture from their parish church, and devote the proceeds to their school. The arrangement proved controversial, and the bells, at least, were bought in for the town's continuing use; but the sale generated a sufficient endowment to establish the school. Prior to this period the town had been managed by a portmoot court of limited powers, whose officers or portreeves had worked closely with the Corpus Christi guild. From 1548 the town, including the school, was directed by a new borough corporation.⁵⁴ At Boston in 1545, the leading townspeople responded promptly to Henry VIII's act of that year for the expropriation of guild and chantry property as an expedient to relieve his military debt. They successfully petitioned the crown for licence to incorporate their government as a mayor and common council, with the right to purchase property from the aldermen of the guilds, and with permission granted also to the guilds to alienate their estates in this way: provisions which clearly indicate that the guilds had long been thought of as managing these resources for civic purposes. The Bostonians thereby managed to sidestep the 1547 act of suppression.⁵⁵ Analogous was the case of Stratford-upon-Avon, where the guild of the Holy Cross had obtained a licence from the bishop—the lord of the town—in 1270, and before the end of the same century had constructed a guildhall, a chapel, and a hospital.⁵⁶ The survival among its archives of tax assessments for the town from the early fourteenth century indicates the fraternity's involvement in local government. A fragmentary

⁵³ For the background, see Robert Tittler, 'The incorporation of boroughs, 1540–1558', *History*, 62 (1977), 24–42.

⁵⁴ W. R. James, *The Charters and Other Documents Relating to the King's Town and Parish of Maidstone* (London, 1825), 1–18; Walter B. Gilbert, *The Accounts of Corpus Christi Fraternity, and Papers Relating to the Antiquities of Maidstone* (Maidstone, 1865), 41–4; J. M. Russell, *The History of Maidstone* (Maidstone, 1881), 164; *Records of Maidstone* (Maidstone, 1926), 47. The surviving accounts of the Corpus Christi guild 1474–99 record the guild's support of an almshouse but not yet of a school. Kent Archives Office, MSS Md G 1–27. They hint at a link between the guild and the portreeves. J(ohn) Wode, who was a warden of the guild in the late 1480s, is referred to in the guild accounts for 1496–7 as 'then portreeve'. MSS Md G 17–18, 24.

⁵⁵ Royal charter for the town of Boston, 14 May 1545: a contemporary copy in Boston, Municipal Buildings, and another, of 19th-century date, MS 1/B/5.

⁵⁶ Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, MS 1/3/155; for the date of Bishop Giffard's grant see Christopher Dyer, 'Medieval Stratford: a successful small town', in Robert Bearman, ed., *The History of an English Borough: Stratford-upon-Avon 1196–1996* (Stroud 1997), 43–61, at pp. 45–6 and n. 19.

account from 1387 records an *interlocutio* or regular meeting of the Holy Cross fraternity, with new admissions to membership noted alongside resolutions for the vill ('it is ordered by the whole community of the vill of Stratford that...') regarding pigs and other matters.⁵⁷ The guild firmly asserted its status as an important if unconstitutional contributor to the government of the town by the construction during the fifteenth century of new almshouses, a grammar school, and two public clocks: one, with gilded numbers and two faces, respectively internal to the guildhall and external towards the public street, and the other at the high cross.⁵⁸ In 1553 the inhabitants obtained from the crown permission to buy back the confiscated property of the fraternity, and to use this to endow a newly created corporate borough.⁵⁹

The extent to which guilds acted in this way, as agencies of local government, has remained obscured in the historical record for compelling reasons which encouraged those involved to be discreet about their activities. It seems probable that more-or-less informal guilds played important roles in the development of urban policy and communal identity over a long period, wherever legal or political circumstances precluded the establishment of autonomous civic institutions. It has been convincingly suggested that in the developing towns of medieval France and Italy, confraternities led the evolution of urban government by their own example of practical public works.⁶⁰ Lacking recognition in law, and periodically subject to hard questioning about their intentions as they were on the occasion of the English royal inquiry of 1388–9, the guilds had every reason to cultivate at times an image of relatively simple piety which, however, is regularly belied by fragmentary evidence which illuminates the true scope of their political ambitions. The guild of St Mary and St John the Baptist of Lichfield submitted a return to that late fourteenth-century inquiry which declared its purposes in the terms used also in many other cases:

⁵⁷ Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, MS XII/214; cf. Rodney Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975), 93.

⁵⁸ The clocks: *The Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross, St Mary and St John the Baptist, Stratford-upon-Avon*, ed. Mairi Macdonald (Stratford-upon-Avon, 2007), 70 (the making of the clock at the guildhall); Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, MS BRT 1/3/84 (repairs to the town clock called 'le clockhouse'; and a reference to a distinct bell in the guild chapel called 'le clock'); MS BRT 1/3/101 (the bell called 'le toun klok'); MS BRT 1/3/102 (the clock at High Cross). The other guild buildings: Levi Fox, 'Some new sidelights on Stratford-upon-Avon's medieval guild buildings', *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society*, 70 (1952), 48–59; *English Historical Documents*, iv, 1327–1485, ed. A. R. Myers, 2nd edn (London, 1996), 929–30; *The Victoria History of the County of Warwickshire*, ii (London, 1908), 113–15; *The Victoria History of the County of Warwickshire*, iii (London, 1945), 276–8; Dyer, 'Medieval Stratford', 53.

⁵⁹ *The Victoria History of the County of Warwickshire*, iii, 247–9.

⁶⁰ Catherine Vincent, 'L'apport des confréries à la pratique du droit dans la société urbaine, à partir d'exemples français et italiens des XIII–XV^e siècles', in Pierre Monnet and Otto Gerhard Oexle, eds, *Stadt und Recht im Mittelalter. La ville et le droit au Moyen Âge* (Göttingen, 2003), 97–115.

to maintain divine service and works of charity and to suppress vice and evil deeds . . . so that peace, tranquillity, concord and unity should be promoted in that town.⁶¹

As has been emphasized in Chapters 2 and 3, these were by no means insubstantial goals, nor were they intended to be taken as merely generic statements of principle. Their rhetorical expression, however, was certainly influenced by the context of suspicion, and consequently gives no more than a partial account of the ways in which this and other guilds were able to pursue their purposes in practice. The peaceable manifesto of 1388–9 was slightly amplified in the contemporary statutes of the Lichfield guild, but without provoking undue interest in its political resources.⁶² In the royal charter which the guild had obtained just a year before parliament called for the general inquiry, perhaps in anticipation of some such challenge, the society bound itself to eschew subversive assemblies. The company's later account of itself delivered to the chantry commissioners in Edward VI's reign sounded to those officers of state no less innocuous.⁶³ Yet the royal records preserve only a tactfully edited version of the truth. In 1486 a supplementary set of ordinances was copied into the Lichfield guild register: ordinances which show the organization in a different light.⁶⁴ The articles of 1486 were said to have been ordained 'for the worship of the city [and the] unity, peace, and welfare of the community.' They reveal the masters of the guild, clad in impressive scarlet gowns, collaborating with a body called 'the forty-eight', to govern the secular life of the town. Measures for the preservation of the peace, the control of litigation, and the punishment of moral misdemeanours indicate that these dignitaries were in effect the ruling body of Lichfield.⁶⁵ This might seem surprising: according to the law, the town at this period enjoyed no rights of self-government whatsoever, being entirely subject to the direction of the bishop. The bishop's seigneurial court, intermittent records of which survive from the early fifteenth century onwards, claimed to deal with all matters of petty jurisdiction. Many such affairs did in fact come before the jury of this court (which itself included many officers of the guild sitting in different guise).⁶⁶ Its monopoly, however, was compromised by the operation

⁶¹ The National Archives (TNA): PRO C 47/145/395.

⁶² Gervase Rosser, 'The guild of St Mary and St John the Baptist, Lichfield: ordinances of the late fourteenth century', *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, 4th series, 13 (1988), 19–26.

⁶³ *Collections for a History of Staffordshire* (1915), 171.

⁶⁴ Lichfield, Staffordshire, Lichfield Joint Record Office, MS D 77/1, Register of the guild of St Mary and St John the Baptist.

⁶⁵ Lichfield guild register, fols 5^v–8; printed in *The Gild of St Mary, Lichfield, being Ordinances of the Gild of St Mary, and Other Documents*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, Early English Text Society, extra series, 114 (1920), 2–10.

⁶⁶ Staffordshire Record Office, MS D (W) 1734/2/1/597; a stray at Birmingham Reference Library, MS DV 115/399744B: Court rolls of the portmoot court of Lichfield, early 15th and early 16th century.

of the guild. This organization, while recognizing the theoretical supremacy of the bishop, explicitly arrogated to itself the exercise of justice and part of its profits. In the statutes published in 1486, the initial judgement and punishment of disturbers of the peace were appropriated by the fraternity: 'the presentment . . . unto my lord [the bishop] reserved notwithstanding'.⁶⁷ Equally indicative of the guild's presumption is the fact that an earlier meeting of the fraternity in 1389, the very year of the royal inquiry, described as a 'full gathering of the brothers and sisters of the guild of St Mary', could register a recent deed concerning a local property transaction with which the guild itself had no evident connection, as if the society were the principal local court.⁶⁸ When, following the familiar pattern, the townspeople in the aftermath of the dissolution of their guild petitioned the crown in 1548 for a grant of civic incorporation, the new constitution of the incorporated borough was in practical essentials a reformulation of the medieval guild. Part of the guild's extensive property in Lichfield and elsewhere in Staffordshire (worth upwards of £60 a year) had been tactically conveyed to trustees for civic uses before the guild's demise.⁶⁹ The new corporation of two bailiffs and twenty-four burgesses included no fewer than twelve former masters of the guild, and it continued to meet in the guildhall which had existed in Bore Street since the early fifteenth century.⁷⁰

CIVIC SPIRIT

The conception of local government as an inclusive religious duty, and one which could therefore be ideally articulated in the language of the guilds, was characteristic also of the more legally empowered councils of larger towns. The protective stance adopted by the city government of York towards the local

⁶⁷ *The Gild of St Mary*, ed. Furnivall, 12.

⁶⁸ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 855, p. 202. This is a copy of 1659 of an original record (which seems not to be extant), among the transcripts of Lichfield documents made by and for Elias Ashmole.

⁶⁹ TNA: PRO SC 12/29/1/1–2. In 1545 most of the extra-urban property was transferred to trustees, thereby pre-empting disappropriation by the crown in 1547, in order to maintain Lichfield's water supply. The implication of the grant is that the management of the common conduits had previously been a concern of the guild. The deed of transfer is Lichfield Joint Record Office, MS D 77/16/1; printed in translation in P. Laithwaite, *The History of the Lichfield Conduit Lands, 1546 to 1946* (Lichfield, 1947), 77–8 (wrongly dated to 1546 at p. 9).

⁷⁰ Lichfield guild register, 392; T. Harwood, *The History and Antiquities of the Church and City of Lichfield* (Gloucester, 1806), 335–6, 418–19; for the guildhall in existence by 1421 see p. 478 n. Additional detail in Gervase Rosser, 'The town and guild of Lichfield in the late Middle Ages', *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 27 (1987 for 1985–6), 39–47. For continuity of civic charitable enterprise beyond the suppression of the guilds see also p. 78 and n. 176 in the present study.

hero and civic patron, St William, was characteristic. From the beginning of the fifteenth century the town guild of Corpus Christi was invested by the mayor with an official role as keeper of the precious shrine which was housed in St William's chapel on Ouse Bridge: the annual ceremony of its display during a procession at the feast of Corpus Christi became the vehicle for the secular rulers of the city to associate themselves with the long-established local cult. The proclaimed alignment of interests between St William, as supernatural patron of York, the mayoral council, and the whole body of the townspeople was emphasized by the rhetorical assertion, contained in an agreement negotiated between the city government and the Corpus Christi fraternity in 1432, that 'the whole city is a member of the guild'.⁷¹ By a similar process the secular rulers of Lincoln around 1500 cultivated an association with a popular local guild of St Anne (originally founded in 1344), helping in the process to make its festival the principal event in the civic calendar. They then declared every inhabitant of the city to be, *ipso facto*, a member of the guild.⁷²

Civic religious drama, commonly presented by guilds, similarly drew down a universal narrative of sin and salvation which could be appropriated at different political and social levels. To the magistracy, the plays offered an opportunity for association with a prestigious event, and a chance to show off to wealthy and influential visitors the town's well-governed condition. The mayoral council of York explicitly noted that the presentation of the city's plays at Corpus Christi attracted outsiders and redounded 'to the honour and profit of the city'.⁷³ That these religious plays were put on in the public street lent some credibility to the magistrates' claim to undertake responsibility, alongside the clergy, for the moral welfare of the townspeople at large.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, clerics saw in the plays—of which they were probably the authors—a pedagogic opportunity. This was made explicit in the York play of *Pater Noster*, which was dramatized by a particular fraternity in order to

⁷¹ *The Register of the Guild of Corpus Christi in the City of York*, ed. R. H. Skaife, Surtees Society, 57 (1871), 252; *Records of Early English Drama: York*, ed. Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, 2 vols (Manchester, 1979), ii, *sub anno* 1432; Alexandra F. Johnston, 'The guild of Corpus Christi and the procession of Corpus Christi in York', *Mediaeval Studies*, 38 (1976), 372–84.

⁷² S. J. Kahrl, 'Secular life and popular piety in medieval English drama', in T. J. Heffernan, ed., *The Popular Literature of Medieval England* (Knoxville, IL, 1985), 85–107, at p. 89.

⁷³ Special performances were scheduled for royal visits. *Records of Early English Drama: York*, ii, p. 11; *Extracts from the Municipal Records of the City of York*, ed. R. Davies (London, 1843), 171–3; *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry*, ed. R. W. Ingram (Manchester, 1981), 66, 67–8.

⁷⁴ Lawrence M. Clopper, 'Lay and clerical impact on civic religious drama and ceremony', in M. G. Briscoe and J. C. Coldwey, eds, *Contexts for Early English Drama* (Bloomington, IN, 1989), 102–36, at p. 112. See also R. B. Dobson, 'Craft guilds and city: the historical origins of the York mystery plays reassessed', in A. E. Knight, ed., *The Stage as Mirror* (Cambridge, 1997), 91–105; Jeremy Goldberg, 'Craft guilds, the Corpus Christi play and civic government', in Sarah Rees Jones, ed., *The Government of Medieval York* (York, 1997), 141–63.

explain the meaning of the Lord's Prayer; and in a fictional village preacher's injunction to his ignorant congregation, who could not understand the doctrines of the Creed, to 'go your way to Coventry and there you shall see them all played in Corpus Christi play'.⁷⁵ Yet while in mayoral or clerical eyes this civic drama represented a political, economic, or educational resource, the perception of both actors and audience could be significantly different in focus. Whatever roles came to be played by magistrates and churchmen, the original initiative and enduring motivation of the plays came from the crafts, whether or not explicitly organized through associated fraternities.⁷⁶ The publishing of the banns of the plays in the surrounding region makes clear that a diverse crowd was expected,⁷⁷ and allusions in the surviving texts imply an audience which was wide in its social spectrum. 'Draw therefore nearhand, both of burgh and town', Herod invites the crowd in the Wakefield *Magnus Herodes*. In the case of the *Castle of Perseverance*, God's protection is invoked on 'all the good commons of this town that before us stand | In this place'.⁷⁸ The performers, too, were drawn from throughout urban society, as many records of the plays make clear. A play called *Vicious*, which formed part of a *Pater Noster* series at Beverley, was presented by 'gentlemen, merchants, and valets', acting together in the manner, if not under the specific title, of a guild.⁷⁹

The organization of public religious plays by representatives of the crafts and other groups of late-medieval townspeople was symptomatic of a broader tendency, becoming increasingly marked between the thirteenth and the sixteenth century, which saw lay men and women taking ownership of collective purposes and projects which had previously tended to be the preserve of ecclesiastical institutions. By 1400, in marked contrast to the situation in 1200, fraternities were a frequently adopted means for a group of lay people to support and arrange services in their local church; to build and maintain a bridge; to establish an almshouse or hospital; to support a 'common midwife'; or to endow a school.⁸⁰ The great Benedictine monasteries continued in the later Middle Ages to provide a grammar school education for city boys; but from 1400 onwards the quantity of new foundations by lay

⁷⁵ Joshua Toulmin Smith and Lucy Toulmin Smith, eds, *English Gilds*, Early English Text Society, original series, 40 (1870), 137–8; P. M. Zall, ed., *A Hundred Merry Tales* [1526] (Lincoln, NE, 1963), 115–16.

⁷⁶ See pp. 128–31 in the present study.

⁷⁷ Kahrl, 'Secular life and popular piety', 90–1; E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1903), ii. 387.

⁷⁸ *The Towneley Plays*, ed. M. Stevens and A. C. Cawley, Early English Text Society, supplementary series, 13 (1994), ii. 202; Kahrl, 'Secular life and popular piety', 90.

⁷⁹ Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage*, ii. 341.

⁸⁰ The Holy Cross guild of Birmingham supported two bridges, hired three chaplains and an organist in the parish church, and supported a town midwife. *The Victoria History of the County of Warwickshire*, viii. 319.

patrons is striking: these were either individuals, who very often entrusted a fraternity with the management of the school, or the members of a guild acting in concert.⁸¹ Especially in smaller towns, guild-run schools became common. The Stratford guild may have employed a schoolmaster from an earlier date, but in the 1420s it invested in a school building and a teacher for the free education of local youth.⁸² A century later, the year 1521 saw the endowment of free schools both at Saffron Walden and at Wisbech; in each case, the lay patron elected a local fraternity to hold the funds and manage the project.⁸³ Detailed syllabuses are rarely recorded, but the documented instance of Saffron Walden, where the pattern of work was copied from Eton and Winchester, demonstrates that the educational ambitions of these schools should not be underestimated. Together with the other public works undertaken by the late-medieval guilds, they are indicative of the extent to which lay men and women at this time were prepared to shoulder and to share responsibility for an ideal of a moral community.

Guilds and civic authorities alike thus configured the challenges of public life as a sacred and communal task, to which all were free to contribute as participants, whether as full members of a fraternity or as its benefactors and collaborators. The concentration of effective political power in the hands of an economic elite, which was no less evident in late-medieval towns of whatever size, cut sharply across this communal language of the guilds. Gross inequalities of wealth and political influence unquestionably existed in all cases. Where participation meant the payment of unpopular taxes, pious slogans counted for little.⁸⁴ As in the newly incorporated boroughs of the mid-sixteenth century, so also in the more fully self-governing cities of the later Middle Ages, institutionalized authority crystallized social divisions and restricted the potential for any sense of inclusion. The guilds as an institutional

⁸¹ Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London, 1973), 205–6 and ch. 7, *passim*; J. A. H. Moran, *The Growth of English Schooling, 1340–1548: Learning, Literacy and Laicization in Pre-Reformation York Diocese* (Princeton, 1985), ch. 6; Caroline M. Barron, ‘The expansion of education in fifteenth-century London’, in John Blair and Brian Golding, eds, *The Cloister and the World* (Oxford, 1996), 219–45; and see the cautionary remarks of Nicholas Orme, ‘The “laicisation” of English school education, 1250–1560’, *History of Education*, 16 (1987), 81–9.

⁸² Sylvia Gill, ‘“Where one is a scholemaster of grammar”: the guild school and teaching in Stratford-upon-Avon, c.1420–1558’, in J. R. Mulryne, ed., *The Guild and Guild Buildings of Shakespeare’s Stratford: Society, Religion, School and Stage* (Farnham, 2012), 59–72. The school founded by the Stratford guild, refounded at the Reformation, continues today.

⁸³ Anne F. Sutton, ‘Lady Joan Bradbury (d. 1530)’, in Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton, eds, *Medieval London Widows, 1300–1500* (London, 1994), 209–38, at pp. 228–9; T. Wright, ‘Rules of the free school of Saffron Walden’, *Archaeologia*, 34 (1852), 37–41; W. Watson, *An Historical Account of the Ancient Town and Port of Wisbech* (Wisbech, 1827), 657–9.

⁸⁴ S. H. Rigby and Elizabeth Ewan, ‘Government, power and authority 1300–1540’, in D. M. Palliser, ed., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, i, 600–1540 (Cambridge, 2000), 291–312.

category should not be idealized. None the less, the values which they articulated and at times embodied had a demonstrable appeal and impact over a wide social spectrum. Across the range from market villages and small towns to relatively large cities, both the rhetoric and the practice of the late-medieval fraternities disseminated an ideal of participation of which the moral charge was, at times, sufficiently powerful to draw a very wide range of people into its wake.

GUILDS AND POLITIES

It was noted at the outset of this study that the guilds of late-medieval England operated within a regnal polity which, for the period, was exceptionally consolidated and centralized.⁸⁵ What, after the above review of the political identity and activities of these associations, can be said about the larger issue of the relationship between guilds and the evolving state? The period of the maximum recorded expansion and proliferation in the activities of the guilds, between the late thirteenth and the late fourteenth centuries, was certainly not a period in which royal government was, in general, lacking. On the contrary, this century witnessed significant advances in royal administration, which penetrated the localities through innovatory systems of tax-collection, itinerant royal justices, knights of the shire with novel responsibilities, and the regular summons of members of parliament.⁸⁶ The concurrent development of local processes of association and self-regulation, manifest in the guilds, would appear, in fact, to have been stimulated by this very expansion of regnal activity. In addition to other, social and moral, incentives which have been discussed elsewhere in this book, it seems a reasonable inference that the reasons for forming fraternities included a desire, partly encouraged by new demands imposed on localities by the crown, to organize civic and regional political systems functioning within the larger polity of the kingdom. The expanding power of the crown was not always welcomed by subjects with unreserved enthusiasm, and the relationship of local fraternities to central government could be oppositional as well as collaborative. However, the interplay in this period tended not to be openly conflictual, since the strength of royal power was on the whole a sufficient discouragement to resistance. Dramatic exceptions to this generalization, notably the Peasants' Revolt, are a warning of the strains within the system, and of the potential independence of

⁸⁵ See pp. 4–5 in the present study.

⁸⁶ Michael Prestwich, *Plantagenet England 1225–1360* (Oxford, 2005), 55–77; Scott L. Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III* (Cambridge, 1991), 153–69; W. M. Ormrod, *Political Life in Medieval England 1300–1450* (Basingstoke, 1995).

local groups. But the rebels of 1381 do not appear to have drawn extensively upon the resources of the guilds (notwithstanding subsequent rumours to this effect among the propertied); and pragmatically, a local guild would typically operate within rather than against the prevailing political structures. While England remains distinguished for the sophistication of its royal government, and therefore also for the *modus vivendi* which this central power developed with voluntary associations, it has been observed as a general development throughout the polities of western Europe during the fourteenth century that 'more active governments created more politically engaged and mutually interactive subjects', with consequences for political authority which could be both strengthening and destabilizing, in diverse circumstances.⁸⁷ This was the historical context in which there first developed, in late-medieval England, a version of that more-or-less balanced coexistence of a centralized state and a vibrant culture of voluntary associations and pressure groups which has been seen as the defining characteristic of modern British 'civil society'.⁸⁸

If the long fourteenth century was characterized by a relatively easy coexistence and mutuality between guilds and royal authority, from the later fifteenth century this situation began to show signs of strain, as the crown consolidated its position. This was not a simple, teleological development of 'the early modern state'. Elements of decentralization would persist in England, as they would also within the 'new monarchies' of the period in Spain, France, and Scotland. But the turn of the sixteenth century saw princely governments differentiating themselves more definitively than in the past from other political organizations, and claiming more effectively to embody an overriding authority.⁸⁹ In a parallel development in Florence, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed the marginalization or outright suppression of the older, pluralistic language of guild republicanism, as a less tolerant culture of patriarchal politics gained ascendancy.⁹⁰ The Tudor regime, which defined itself as the architect of peace after a period of civil strife, also became increasingly intolerant of political pluralism. As was observed earlier, the demise of all of the English guilds at the hand of the crown in the 1540s must be seen, not only as an outcome of religious developments, but as the calculated act of a royal government jealous of its exclusive claim to rule.⁹¹ Again, with local variations, the pattern across the remainder of western Europe at this time was similar, as monarchs consolidated their authority, the standardization of law reduced the possibility of appeal to local processes

⁸⁷ John Watts, *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300–1500* (Cambridge, 2009), 263.

⁸⁸ See p. 15 in the present study.

⁸⁹ Watts, *The Making of Polities*, 376–80.

⁹⁰ Mark Jurdjevic, 'Voluntary associations reconsidered: *compagnie* and *arti* in Florentine politics', in Nicholas A. Eckstein and Nicholas Terpstra, eds, *Sociability and its Discontents: Civil Society, Social Capital, and their Alternatives in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout, 2009), 1–20.

⁹¹ See pp. 4–5 in the present study.

of arbitration, and theorists of government clarified the mutual responsibilities of rulers and subjects, marginalizing and delegitimizing lesser political groupings.⁹²

And yet, notwithstanding this temporal shift in the balance of relations, it would be wrong to conclude that the communal concerns which had motivated the medieval guilds were eliminated by the enlarged pretensions of early modern governments. The persistence, for long into the modern period, of local custom and legal immunities is testament not only to the power of vested interests but also to the resilience of that willingness to take responsibility for communal issues which had been manifest in the guilds.⁹³ The resurgence of civic spirit in the newly incorporated small towns of the mid-sixteenth century has been noted; and if the new urban councils offered a reduced scope for participation, the varieties of informal philanthropy, charity schools, alms-houses, and mutual aid societies which continued to flourish throughout the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represented a partial surrogate for at least some of the moral enterprise of the former guilds. Whereas it used to be thought that the beginnings in this period of state provision for charity marked the demise of local initiative, recent research has demonstrated that this endured to flourish as a significant adjunct to what was being organized by government.⁹⁴ Aspirations which had informed the guilds found new forms of voluntary expression which continued to function as a complement to state philanthropy.

THE COMMUNITY OF THE DEAD

The bonds which were fostered by the guilds extended beyond the bounds of mortal life. Death, the great leveller, provided the common denominator which, alone, united all late-medieval Christians. It faced each individual

⁹² Watts, *The Making of Politics*, 388, 395–6.

⁹³ For the persistence of sanctuary, throughout the later Middle Ages and into the early modern period, as a communally operated foil to royal justice, see Gervase Rosser, 'Sanctuary and social negotiation in medieval England', in John Blair and Brian Golding, eds, *The Cloister and the World* (Oxford, 1996), 57–79.

⁹⁴ Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2008), sheds important light on the continuing significance of neighbourhood, craft-based, and informal kinds of charity in the late 16th and 17th centuries, and on the emergence in the late 17th and 18th centuries of new mutual aid and friendly societies. Ben-Amos's use of the theory of gift-exchange to account for these phenomena privileges utilitarian motives, and leads her to overlook the potential significance, in her period, of less functional emotional relationships, friendship, and care. On the continuity of charitable practices across the Reformation period, see also Marjorie J. McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England: 1350–1600* (Cambridge, 2012).



Fig. 8 Fayrey Pall or hearse-cloth, showing members of the fraternity of St John the Baptist, Dunstable, with their patron saint, c.1500. Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum, London, with kind permission of Richard Andrews, Rector of Dunstable.

with the prospect of his or her own mortality, together with the further and greater question of the soul's salvation. By the same token it presented the society of the living with an enormous collective responsibility for the appropriate treatment of the dead. The doctrine of purgatory gained greater definition in the late thirteenth century, from which period also the idea that prayers for the deceased were efficacious became generalized as a universal responsibility; but the belief that the intercession of the living could alleviate the pains of departed souls dates from the early centuries of Christianity.⁹⁵ The Christian scriptures, with an eschatological focus on the future prospect and ultimate fate of the soul, envisaged a stark, dualist partition of the dead at

⁹⁵ The argument of Jacques Le Goff, *La naissance du purgatoire* (Paris, 1981), transl. A. Goldhammer as *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago, 1984), that the concept of purgatory was born in the 1160s with the first appearance of the word in historical sources, has been justly criticized for its summary exclusion of a long pre-history of related vision literature. None the less Le Goff was correct to point to the long 13th century as the period in which the idea was both subjected to theological analysis and first systematically disseminated by churchmen as an element of pastoral teaching. The first important statement on purgatory by the Latin Church was made at the 1274 Council of Lyons.

the Last Judgement. But it seems to have been anxiety about the awful finality of this distinction which gave rise, from an early date, to a conviction that the justice of God's judgement might be tempered by mercy, allowing those whose behaviour on earth fell short of perfection to atone for sins by enduring a post-mortem process of purgation which could prepare the soul for eventual admission to paradise. The concept of a progressive transition between death and judgement contributed to the further belief that the efforts of the living might continue to avail the departed in the afterlife. Crucial authority for such a concession to the living of a role in the assistance of the dead was provided by St Augustine in a subtle passage of his *Confessions* (AD 397), in which he worked through his reaction to the death of his mother.⁹⁶ Praying for God's mercy on Monica's soul for any sins she had committed ('please forgive her her debts if she contracted any'), Augustine appropriated to himself the hopeful words of St Paul:

You have mercy on whom you will have mercy, and show pity to whom you are compassionate.⁹⁷

Continuing to pray for his mother, Augustine at the same time acknowledged the impossibility of making satisfaction to God for the immeasurable gift already given for the redemption of mankind by the sacrifice of Christ. Monica, he reflected, should acknowledge before God no sins on her own part (lest the devil should make a claim):

Her answer will be that her debts have been forgiven by him to whom no one can repay the price which he, who owed nothing, paid on our behalf.

This ambivalent passage in St Augustine lies at the heart of the later medieval practice of intercessory prayer. On the one hand, despite the fact that the perfection both of divine justice and of Christ's sacrifice appeared to render intercessory prayer redundant, it was declared to be natural that the concern of the living for the dead should find expression in imprecations offered up to the divinity for mercy. In another work, Augustine underlined the point: while the elaborate ceremonies funded by the rich for the burial of relatives were of little importance, the crucial responsibility of the living was to offer prayers for the dead, whoever they were—and not merely for a particular individual, but for all departed souls.⁹⁸ On the other hand, Augustine in the sentence from the *Confessions* cited above acknowledged that Christians owed a collective obligation for the gift of Christ's sacrifice which promised redemption for all who believed. Impossible though it was to repay this freely given assurance of

⁹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1991), 177–8.

⁹⁷ Cf. Rom. 9.15.

⁹⁸ Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda: Patrologia Latina*, 40.591–610, at 596 ('non sunt praetermittendae supplicationes mortuorum').

salvation, it imposed upon the living an awareness of the debt which was the shared *munus* of the Christian community. In Augustinian terms which would remain fundamental to the thought behind the later medieval guilds, the only possible response of men and women to the supreme act of divine love represented by the Crucifixion was to love God, however inadequately, in return. The means to do this on earth was through charity, whereby one could show love for the deity in his creatures.⁹⁹

Death thus bound medieval Christians in a double obligation. The supreme act of Christ's Passion which guaranteed eternal life to the sincere believer called for a gesture of self-sacrifice on the part of mortal men and women, a collective act of charity in this world which, if it could not equal, might on a human scale correspond to the divine gift. Meanwhile, the operation of God's mercy invited the constant prayers of the living for the salvation of the dead and for the attenuation of their punishment. Although scripture offered little sanction for the belief in purgatory, the theology of final judgement prompted compassion to call it into being.¹⁰⁰ Visionary accounts of the penitential sufferings of souls in purgatory, from that of Drythelm reported by Bede in the eighth century to St Bridget of Sweden's terrifying description which circulated widely in the later Middle Ages, fed the hope and the conviction that prayer could lessen the duration of the process.¹⁰¹ While the emphasis of these reports varied—the tenor of Dante's depiction of purgatory is rendered thoroughly optimistic by the confident anticipation by its residents of their eventual redemption, whereas the tone of visions from northern Europe tended to be gloomier as they dwelled on the horrors of punishment, and did not always agree that the suffering souls were aware that they would eventually be released—the effect in all cases was not merely to encourage the living to amend their own lives, but also to turn thoughts to the ancestors in urgent need of prayer. Whereas the early visions tended to be experienced by, and about, monks, towards 1200 the range of reference of recorded ideas about the purgation of souls was greatly widened to include the secular Christian community in its entirety.¹⁰² This shift is consistent with the emergence, already noted in relation to the multiplication of fraternities at this time, of a new assurance on the part of laymen in the determination of their own lives: a change, as Richard Southern observed, from the vision of life

⁹⁹ See also Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁰ The early development of the idea of purgatory, especially by Bede in the early 8th century, is demonstrated by Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2010).

¹⁰¹ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), 488–99 (V.12); *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden*, ed. R. Ellis, Early English Text Society, 291 (1987), 298.

¹⁰² Brian Patrick McGuire, 'Purgatory, the communion of saints, and medieval change', *Viator*, 20 (1989), 61–84, gives a valuable account of changing ideas about purgatory to c.1200.

in the epic as a matter of endurance and fatalism, to that of the romance, in which individuals began to shape their own destiny.¹⁰³

In late-medieval manifestations of belief in purgatory as a stage in the process of salvation, fear played a part, but the tenor of the sources does not suggest that late-medieval Christians were motivated by terror or hysteria.¹⁰⁴ The certain prospect of going alone into the realm of death stimulated, rather, a rational anxiety concerning the fate both of one's own soul and of those of others already departed. That concern was intensified by a heightened sense of the fragility of familial ties, consequent upon increased mortality rates and personal mobility which became marked after c.1300. By contrast with our own culture which keeps death out of sight, there was nobody in later medieval Europe unfamiliar with the touch of a dead body. Yet high death rates and the dispersal of kin left many fearful of finding themselves solitary at the last, and without the means to ensure their own Christian burial. The Black Death was not alone responsible for such anxieties, which of course were older; but dreadful scenes, in the mid-fourteenth century and later, of corpses thrown into common pits or abandoned at the roadside, and of parishioners who sometimes refused to bear those dead of the plague to burial, certainly contributed to the desire to establish fraternities which would undertake this as a collective responsibility.¹⁰⁵ Frequently remarked in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were a sense of deracination and a concern that traditional family ties between the generations could not be relied upon to secure adequate commemoration during the next passage of the soul.¹⁰⁶ The play of *Lazarus*, performed by crafts and fraternities in the streets of fifteenth-century English towns, put into the mouth of the eponymous protagonist, who had been with the dead and returned to life, an awful warning about the danger of being forgotten by the living. The family and possessions which had seemed so supportive in life were of no further use, and the tendency of the survivors would be to neglect the deceased:

Thai myn [*remember*] you with nothing
That may be youre helping,

¹⁰³ R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London, 1952), 222.

¹⁰⁴ See the balanced accounts of Duffy, *Altars*, 338–76; and of Peter Marshall, 'Fear, purgatory and polemic in Reformation England', in W. G. Naphy and P. Roberts, eds, *Fear in Early Modern Society* (Manchester, 1997), 150–66.

¹⁰⁵ Caroline M. Barron, 'The parish fraternities of medieval London', in C. M. Barron and C. Harper-Bill, eds, *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society* (Woodbridge, 1985), 13–37, at p. 24; Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066–1550* (London and New York, 1997), 189–95.

¹⁰⁶ Jacques Chiffolleau, 'La religion flamboyante (v.1320–v.1520)', in Jacques Le Goff, ed., *Histoire de la France religieuse*, ii (Paris, 1988), 11–183, at pp. 152–5, convincingly suggests that the multiplication of intercessory masses in the later Middle Ages should be seen not as the result of 'la simple peur de la peste', but rather of 'cette transformation radicale et douloureuse d'un certain rapport imaginaire aux pères, à la tradition, au temps, au monde et au sacré' (p. 155).

Nawther in mes [*mass*] syngyng,
 Ne yit with almus dede [*alms' deed*];
 Therefor in youre levyng [*living*]
 Be wise and take good hede.¹⁰⁷

The double incentive was to lead a better life while at the same time remembering the condition of those already dead. As the souls lament in Thomas More's *Supplication*, 'we have been with many folk much forgotten of negligence'.¹⁰⁸

The twofold motivation, in the sight of death, to attend to the ethics of social life in this world and to have the dead in constant remembrance goes far to explain the proliferation and the activities of the guilds in the later medieval centuries. The concerns were present from the start of the Christian tradition but from c.1200, as has been noted earlier in this book, the laity seized a markedly increased role in shouldering these responsibilities. Houses of the religious would continue, as before, to function as centres of both charity and prayer; and the clergy retained their importance as celebrants of the divine offices. But to an unprecedented degree, lay men and women now began to take responsibility for the integration of ethical prescriptions into daily life and for the orchestration of a constant stream of prayers for the dead.

The multiplication of intercessory masses, which was sometimes criticized during the later Middle Ages and which was rejected wholesale by Protestantism, has been seen by some modern historians as mechanistic, as though the efficacy of the offices were understood to be automatic. This perspective has tended to perpetuate the related view of sixteenth-century Reformers that the funding of masses was driven by clerical greed. The sources, however, do not support these views.¹⁰⁹ That the mass, as a re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice, should be thought to benefit souls in need of cleansing made theological sense. The *Golden Legend*, the thirteenth-century compilation widely used by late-medieval preachers, gave further explanations of why prayer helped souls in purgatory: the merits of their lives had earned this as their due; they were unable to help themselves; and—crucially—they formed one body with the living: 'the dead are one body with the Church militant, and the goods of the latter must be common to all'.¹¹⁰ What linked the living and the dead still more closely, from the late thirteenth century onwards, was the firm understanding, first articulated by Roger Bacon and incorporated into the

¹⁰⁷ Lazarus, in *English Mystery Plays*, ed. Peter Happé (London, 1975), 406. The play of Lazarus appears in the cycles of York, Coventry, and Chester, and in the unlocated Towneley cycle (the version cited here).

¹⁰⁸ Thomas More, *The Supplication of Souls*, ed. F. Manley et al. (New Haven and London, 1990), 111.

¹⁰⁹ See the excellent discussion in Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2002), 6–46.

¹¹⁰ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, transl. W. Ryan, 2 vols (Princeton, 1993), ii. 289.

theological *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas, that the human body and soul were not contradictory elements temporarily forced together but were, rather, integral to one another. The gradual ageing and decay of the body, before and after death, were now perceived as part of a continuous process whereby body and soul together progressed towards God and the final Judgement at which the two would be reunited.¹¹¹ Underlying all provisions for intercessory prayer, therefore, was the conviction that the dead were joined with the living in a single community, bound together in an unpaid debt to the Redeemer. Heaven itself would be social. With their bodies and souls reunited, relatives and friends would be able to enjoy one another's company in eternity.¹¹² The ideal of the guilds was a pattern of this heavenly vision.

The particular means by which lay men and women made provision for their posthumous commemoration during the later Middle Ages have sometimes been seen by historians as expressive of a growing 'privatization' of religion. Not only the personal chantries and chantry chapels founded by benefactors for themselves and their immediate families, but the commemorative services arranged by lay fraternities have been so described.¹¹³ It is true that although the liturgy declared every mass to be offered for the benefit of 'all Christian souls', an office said with a specific intention to benefit one or more particular people by name was understood (contrary to theological consistency) to be more efficacious for those individuals than a general mass; hence the desire, on the part of those requesting intercession, for multiple services and to be recalled by name.¹¹⁴ Whether, in the case of the guilds, this should be seen as contributing to the 'privatization' of the process of salvation is, however, unclear. The fraternities, all of which sponsored such intercessory services, certainly prioritized their own members, and they have often been seen by modern commentators as 'poor men's chantries'.¹¹⁵ Contemporaries

¹¹¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, 1995), esp. pp. 320–9 (noting that a conviction of the integrity of body and soul was consistent with diverse attitudes towards bodily dissection and partition); André Vauchez, 'La tomba, la morte e il destino del corpo', repr. in his *Esperienze religiose nel Medioevo* (Rome 2003), 237–46; Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, 'The corpse in the Middle Ages: the problem of the division of the body', in Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson, eds, *The Medieval World* (London, 2001), 327–41.

¹¹² Manuele Gragnotati, *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame, 2005), 27–9. See also Dante, *Paradiso*, xiv.62–6.

¹¹³ e.g. Pamela Graves, 'Social space in the English medieval parish church', *Economy and Society*, 18 (1989), 297–322; Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London, 1996), 115–16.

¹¹⁴ *The Lay Folks Mass Book*, ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons, Early English Text Society, original series, 71 (1879), 104–5; Norman Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370–1532* (Toronto, 1984), 105.

¹¹⁵ Barron, 'Parish fraternities', 23–5; J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984), 19–21; W. R. Jones, 'English medieval brotherhoods and medieval lay piety: the inquiry of 1388–1389', *The Historian*, 36 (1974), 646–59, at p. 652; H. F. Westlake, *The Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England* (London, 1919), 32, 44.

were aware that the financial requirements of membership, even in the case of the more modest guilds, excluded many from their spiritual benefits: that consciousness was testified by the individual who left funds to enable those with nothing to be enrolled in a guild—and, indeed, by the guilds which took it upon themselves to bury the poor without means to pay for a mass.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, as has been emphasized in the preceding chapters, a founding principle of the guilds was that the solitary individual was virtually powerless to attain the goal of paradise, and that only through mutual collaboration in charity could most Christians hope to arrive eventually in heaven. From this perspective, the personal or family chantry was not the prototype of the fraternity mass, but was its very opposite. The guilds, in fact, attempted to detach commemoration of the dead from the arbitrary particularity of the family, and to contextualize it within the universal community of all Christians. The society of the fraternity privileged its particular constituency; but it did this in the name not of private salvation but of a universal call to participate in the collective work of redemption—of redeeming the communal debt.

As in its works for the living, so also through its offices for the dead, the guild offered to the individual member a process of mediation which could incorporate him or her into the larger Christian community. The guilds claimed no monopoly on this process, which was effected for all, in some degree, by participation in the parish. The parochial bede-roll, which listed deceased parishioners to be prayed for on their anniversaries, was an eloquent symbol of that other collectivity.¹¹⁷ The two institutions tended to function in complementary ways, which may be illustrated by a parish bede-roll of 1523 from St Mary's church, Wymondham, listing, among individual benefactors of the church to be prayed for, 'the souls of the brotherhood of the light of Our Lady that made the stonework and glass for one window in the aisle and the stone cross in the churchyard', and 'the souls of the brothers and sisters of the guild of St John that did gild part of the reredos at the high altar'.¹¹⁸ Without exaggerating the difference, however, there was an evident moral distinction between the membership of a parish, which was the inescapable lot of all late-medieval Christians, and participation in a guild, which was optional.¹¹⁹

Protestantism, even as it denounced works of this-worldly charity undertaken to redeem a spiritual debt, declared an equal ban on the compassionate communion with the dead. The first Anglican Prayer Book of 1549 permitted

¹¹⁶ Duffy, *Altars*, 152–3; for membership costs see pp. 55–8 in the present study. For burial of the poor see e.g. TNA: PRO C 47/44/344: a guild at Walpole (Norfolk).

¹¹⁷ Duffy, *Altars*, 327–37; Daniell, *Death and Burial*, 17–19.

¹¹⁸ Wymondham, Norfolk, Parish church of St Mary, Roll of benefactors, 1523. The survival of this record in the church may indicate a local reluctance to abandon the practice of commemorative intercession at the Reformation.

¹¹⁹ See pp. 48–9 in the present study.

the dead to be recalled in prayer, but not with any suggestion that the living could affect their state. The 1552 Prayer Book moved more decisively from the traditional sense of familiarity with the dead, whose condition and consideration were no longer legitimate subjects for discussion.¹²⁰ Protestant divines attempted to turn the attention of Christians away from questions about the present state of the dead, to focus instead on the future prospect of an eventual heavenly reunion.¹²¹ However, it did not prove easy to wean the population from beliefs and practices which were deeply rooted. At least until the end of the sixteenth century, popular behaviour continued to evince a belief in the ability of the living to ameliorate the state of the dead; and persistent controversy surrounding similar rites in the seventeenth century demonstrated that belief in the possibility of communion between the dead and the living was tenacious.¹²² The endurance of such behaviour and convictions despite the efforts of clerical authority to re-educate the public are an indication of what was felt to be at stake in the removal of purgatory. The suggestion has been made that the concerns previously expressed through intercession were re-channelled after the Reformation into other preoccupations, with the 'art of dying' or with the operation of divine providence. But this is to mistake purgatory for a social tool, as though it served functions which could be adequately served in other ways.¹²³ On the contrary, the late-medieval desire to maintain communion with the dead was rooted in a theological belief, the denial of which marked a profound break.

TO HAVE IN MIND

The concern of fraternities with burial and commemoration remained central to their activity until the imposition of Protestant reforms put these works in jeopardy. A less marked emphasis upon attendance at funerals has been noted in the fifteenth-century statutes of London guilds, by comparison with the ordinances of the fourteenth century.¹²⁴ It would be misleading, however, to

¹²⁰ Duffy, *Altars*, 475; Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, 108–11.

¹²¹ Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, 215–16.

¹²² Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, 126–7, 141, 261.

¹²³ Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, 312–13, discussing *inter alia* Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family* (Oxford, 1998), 228, and Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999), 16; Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, 'Introduction: placing the dead in late medieval and early modern Europe', in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, eds, *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), 1–16, at pp. 9–11.

¹²⁴ Barron, 'Parish fraternities', 28. H. F. Westlake, 'The origin, purposes, and development of parish guilds in England', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, 17 (1921), 163–74, at pp. 170–1, also believed that he could detect a growing secularism in the concerns of the late

conclude that provision for the dead was sidelined in the later Middle Ages by secular preoccupations. The common concerns for the dead, which motivated participants in the guilds throughout their history, are expressed, with small variations, in almost every set of statutes:

All the brothers and sisters attend the exequies of a dead member of the guild, dressed in their fraternity robes, and each offers 1*d.* at the burial mass and ½*d.* in soul-alsms to the poor. And each brother and sister of the fraternity keeps the soul of the deceased person in his or her memory for thirty days following the death.¹²⁵

The collective symbols of the guild, which accompanied the body to burial, were reassuring promises that the soul would continue on its way towards salvation, not in perilous isolation, but as a member of the greater community of the blessed:

The banner of the guild shall be brought to the house of the dead, and there openly shown, that men may know that the dead was a brother or sister of the guild; and . . . this banner shall be carried, with a great torch burning, from the house of the dead, before the body, to the church, and from the church to the place of burial.¹²⁶

Many societies undertook to bring back the body of a member dying away from home.¹²⁷ The brothers and sisters would then attend the body at the house for a vigil, returning on the following morning to take it, under the protection of the lights and other emblems of the guild, to the funeral service in church, and so finally to the interment. The hearse might be covered by a pall bearing the signs of the guild, such as that donated to a guild at Dunstable in the early sixteenth century, embroidered with a collective portrait of the brothers and sisters of the fraternity at prayer in the presence of their patron saint (Fig. 8).¹²⁸ Bells were a vital part of the services, their sound being understood to keep devils from molesting the soul of the dead person. A bellman employed by the fraternity commonly rang through the town to

15th- and early 16th-century guilds. It may be that the surviving sources in some cases begin to shed more light on this-worldly activities of the fraternities at this relatively late period. It is also possible that Westlake was influenced by a Protestant assumption that Catholic institutions were becoming more secular before the Reformation. In any event, the hypothesis of a general change in this direction is not sustained by a more inclusive review of the evidence.

¹²⁵ TNA: PRO C 47/43/291: the guild of Corpus Christi, Norwich.

¹²⁶ TNA: PRO C 47/40/135; printed in *English Historical Documents*, iv, 1327–1485, ed. A. R. Myers (London [1969], 1996), 1084–5 (no. 624).

¹²⁷ In the case of the London guild of St Augustine, a body would be brought back by the members up to a distance of five leagues. TNA: PRO C 47/41/193.

¹²⁸ Richard Marks and Paul Williamson, eds, *Gothic. Art for England 1400–1547* (London, 2003), 455 cat. 349 and 57 pl. 31; B. Chambers, 'The Fayrey pall', *Bedfordshire Magazine*, 9 (1963–5), 311–15. See also Peter Löffler, *Studien zum Totenbrauchtum* (Münster, 1975), 224–46; Daniell, *Death and Burial*, 47–8; Matthew Davies and Ann Saunders, *The History of the Merchant Taylors' Company* (Leeds, 2004), 30.

announce a death and to prompt the prayers of the living, and the church bells were sounded for the funeral.¹²⁹ The apparitor of the Purification guild in St Mary's church, Cambridge, had the responsibility

to inform brethren of funeral services, meetings and other gatherings, to preside over the offices of the dead, and to organise the torches and the carrying of the body to the church.¹³⁰

A supporter of more than one guild might summon all to be present at the interment. In 1529 Margaret Pepis of Cottenham, in Cambridgeshire, left 8*d.* to each of the guilds of the town, 'so that they come with their banners to bring my body to burial'.¹³¹ On the day of burial of a member of the Holy Trinity guild at Great Yarmouth, a psalter of the Blessed Virgin Mary was said three times.¹³² Additional masses of requiem were normally held one month and one full year after the burial, these being popularly understood to mark the stages by which the soul of the departed, at first prone to haunt the vicinity of the body and of the community of the living, moved gradually farther away.¹³³ The sense of the proximity of the dead, and of their continuing expectations of the living, was expressed in the custom of keeping vigils at the tomb, a practice explicitly allowed by the ordinances of the palmers' guild of Ludlow.¹³⁴

The enduring remembrance of the guild was assured by the obit list or calendar of deceased members. Individual brothers and sisters might request particular commemoration on their anniversaries; but the primary emphasis of fraternity masses for the dead was upon the collectivity of the guild and upon its participation in the universal communion of saints. Guild members were recorded upon admission in the register of the guild, a document known in more than one case as 'the book of life'.¹³⁵ For a period, which may have been extensive in some cases, their names were read aloud, either from this volume or from a separate obit or bede-roll, at the annual fraternity mass. Eventually that particular identity would be lost, subsumed within the gathered body of the living and dead members.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, the inevitable prospect of eventual anonymity in the world of men was the less troubling to

¹²⁹ e.g. TNA: PRO C47/38/36 (guild of the Virgin's Assumption at Tydd St Giles); and see Daniell, *Death and Burial*, 53–3. The Resurrection guild of Chesterton, near Cambridge, reported in 1388–9 that it had contributed the substantial sum of £18 for bells in the church, and a further £11 for small or hand bells. TNA: PRO C 47/38/13.

¹³⁰ TNA: PRO C 47/38/9.

¹³¹ Virginia Bainbridge, 'The medieval way of death: commemoration and the afterlife in pre-Reformation Cambridgeshire', in Michael Wilks, ed., *Prophecy and Eschatology* (Oxford, 1994), 183–204, at p. 196.

¹³² TNA: PRO C 47/45/373.

¹³³ Daniell, *Death and Burial*, 61–3.

¹³⁴ TNA: PRO C 47/45/392; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 194. See also Westlake, *Parish Gilds*, 19.

¹³⁵ e.g. p. 68 in the present study.

¹³⁶ The tendency is noted by Philip Morgan, 'Of worms and war: 1380–1558', in P. C. Jupp and C. Gittings, eds, *Death in England* (Manchester, 1999), 119–46, at pp. 132–3.

the individual whose membership in a guild was, more importantly, the guarantee of his or her integration with the larger community of Christian souls, for whose sake fraternity masses were expected to continue until the end of time. Individual commemoration was understood to be fulfilled within the community of the living and the dead.¹³⁷

The gathering of the brotherhood for the guild mass could be self-regarding in its dominant preoccupation with the membership. The priest who in the mid-fifteenth century conducted services for the Salisbury fraternity of the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist of the tailors read from a bede-roll which opens with this characteristic prayer:

Worshipful masters and brothers and sisters, for as much as it has been laudably accustomed of old and ancient time of our predecessors before us, this day and all such days and times that we be gathered and assembled in like manner and form as we be at this time, to [say] a special prayer and recommendation to Almighty God and to Our Lady St Mary, to St John the Baptist and to all the holy company of heaven, meekly beseeching that blessed Lord of his superabundant and infinite mercy and grace for all the brothers and sisters quick and dead and for the good doers and well-willers of this present fraternity and brotherhood of St John the Baptist . . .

There follows a list of names of members, some annotated with supplementary notes of their particular contributions to the work of the guild.¹³⁸ The impressive register book of a much grander fraternity, that of Corpus Christi at Boston, contains the prayer, equally focused upon those within the guild:

May the brothers and sisters of this guild of Corpus Christi
Live together with Christ in heaven as on earth.¹³⁹

A splendid illuminated page, probably made for open display on the altar during guild services, illustrates the register of the Luton guild of the Holy Trinity (Fig. 1). This represents the founders, led by Thomas Rotherham, bishop of Lincoln and chancellor of England, who is flanked by King Edward IV and Queen Elizabeth, accompanied by the king's mother Cecily, duchess of York. Further groups of well-dressed male and female members of the fraternity join this distinguished gathering in prayer before an image of the enthroned Trinity, in which the figure of the dead Christ is held in the lap of God

¹³⁷ The point that commemoration of individual souls was realized through collective celebration of the Christian community was also made, with respect to the early Middle Ages, by Otto Gerhard Oexle, 'Memoria und Memorialüberlieferung im früheren Mittelalter', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 10 (1975), 70–95.

¹³⁸ Trowbridge, Wiltshire Record Office, MS G 23/1/257 PC.

¹³⁹ British Library, MS Harleian 4795, fol. 5v: 'Confratres isti[us] gilde de corpore cristi | vivunt cum Cristo celo mundo simul isto.'

the Father. A banner between the raised hands of the kneeling bishop bears the legend: 'Blessed God in Trinity, save all this fraternity.'¹⁴⁰

In each of these images, the guild appears in one sense as an exclusive society, shaped by the politics of its specific membership and preoccupied with the benefits of its own brothers and sisters. But an ideal can be expressed in local and particular forms without losing its universal reach. The larger vision shared by these and countless other fraternities was that of the celestial host, into which the members of each of these brotherhoods and sisterhoods aspired to be incorporated. The images of Christ and of the other patron saints to whom the guilds devoted themselves were perceived as members of the heavenly court, whose charity or intercession was needed to assist the faltering steps of the faithful towards their places in paradise. The Luton guild register opens with a calendar of all the saints' days to be observed throughout the year: the particular celebration of the Trinity on the octave of Pentecost was embedded within an inclusive vision of the Christian cosmos. The prayers not only for the fraternity but for all the departed and, in the words of every mass, 'for all Christian souls', drew the particular gathering of the membership towards a wider participation in the communion of the saints. That inclusive vision was expressed in the prayer said regularly by the gathered members of the guild of St Christopher in Norwich:

In the beginning, we shall pray devoutly for the state of holy church, and for the peace of the land; for the pope of Rome and his cardinals; for the patriarch of Jerusalem . . . and for all archbishops and bishops . . . for all parsons and priests, and all orders of holy church . . . for our lord the king, for our lady the queen . . . for all knights, squires, citizens and burgesses, franklins, and all true toilers and men of craft, widows, maidens, wives, and for all the commonalty and Christian people . . . for all true shipmen, and true pilgrims . . . for our fathers' souls and mothers', brothers' and sisters', and for all the brothers and sisters of this guild, and for all Christian souls: amen.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Luton Museum, Luton Guild Register, fol. 13^v; an engraved reproduction in *The Register of the Fraternity or Guild of the Holy and Undivided Trinity and Blessed Virgin Mary in the Parish Church of Luton*, ed. Henry Gough (London, 1906), opposite p. 16; and a colour photograph in Richard Marks, 'Two illuminated guild registers from Bedfordshire', in Michelle P. Brown and Scot McKendrick, eds, *Illuminating the Book: Makers and Interpreters* (London, 1998), 121–41, pl. 2. See also Kathleen Scott, 'The illustration and decoration of the register of the fraternity of the Holy Trinity at Luton church, 1475–1546', in A. S. G. Edwards, Vincent Gillespie, and Ralph Hanna, eds, *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths* (London, 2000), 155–83. Scott and Marks have proposed convincingly that this illumination is the work of an artist trained in or near Bruges. The date is close to 1474, the year of the guild's foundation (*Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1467–77*, pp. 446–7).

¹⁴¹ TNA: PRO C47/43/295; printed in *English Gilds*, ed. Toulmin Smith, 22–3.

CONCLUSION

In late-medieval Europe, hundreds of thousands of men and women gave their resources of time, labour, and money to support collaborative projects, the scope and benefit of which exceeded the secular needs and interest of those responsible. They founded schools, built bridges, and managed almshouses. They maintained chapels, choreographed religious services, and constructed monuments which shaped the sacred space of towns. In the name of an inclusive vision of humanity, they buried and commemorated the dead. In countless instances they chose, as the means to accomplish these enterprises, to form a guild. Diverse as they were in individual cases, members were motivated by a common impulse to undertake these works as a form of charity. Their reasons were complex, and were shot through with social pretensions and political ambition. But no material calculus of self-interest could fully account for their behaviour which, in fact, put at risk the safely balanced integrity of the individual for the sake of a different, collective goal.

This goal was perceived as a common responsibility, to the relief of which each person was invited to contribute his or her share. It was a responsibility with many faces. It might be the figure of the vulnerable young woman recently arrived in town without friends or influence; or the child drowned at the river crossing; or the old man without family or dignity. The response of the guilds to these harsh realities was never more than partial, and was always compromised by fear and prejudice. In the face of the enormous social challenges of late-medieval Europe, it could not be said that the guilds, for all their efforts and their tangible achievements, provided a comprehensive model of local and voluntary welfare. Effectively to address the issues of disease, poverty, education, and care for the aged called for greater resources and for a wider vision of the problems than could be attained in the fraternities, which remained modestly funded and face-to-face societies. On the evidence of this historical experience, voluntarism in the local community cannot substitute for the central oversight of, and even-handed response to, social issues for which the state has more recently demonstrated significantly greater potential.

But nor would it be correct to conclude from the history of the late-medieval guilds, because their systems of practical welfare were haphazard at best, and because their limited horizons rendered them, in the eyes of some, positive hindrances to the effective provision of security in the commonwealth, that the art of constructing solidarity, of which they bequeathed such a rich experience, has no place in a modern political society. For the institution in law of commonly agreed human values, such as equal access to the necessities of life and to education, parity of gender, or the freedom of personal capabilities without prejudice or exclusion, the state, for all its failings, is the

best means yet invented. But local populations and diasporic groups will, like the members of the medieval guilds, continue to recognize and to articulate their distinctive and specific needs, and the ways in which established general principles may best be realized in particular contexts. Today as in the medieval past, the question should not be posed in the form of radical alternatives, but rather with a view to negotiating a constructive interaction between a responsible centre and engaged, empowered, localities.

It was the work of the guilds to catalyse new friendships between individuals of different background and experience. This was not a light undertaking. To treat a relative stranger as if they were a friend entails a risk. It only makes sense as an act of faith. The members of the guilds appropriated and made their own the language of Christian ethics, which recommended the love of others as the path to salvation. But the implementation of that guidance carried a high price in the partial suppression of individual identity and selfish interest. To open up fully to another does not merely entail the temporary suspension of one's private immunity, but it allows the discomfiting possibility of personal change. The ritualized gatherings of the guilds embraced that possibility, calling down supernatural sanction in defence of newly forged relationships of mutual trust. It was from this new vantage point, paradoxically arrived at by initial retreat from the safe ground of personal autonomy, that the individual could recognize and pursue his or her potential for growth as an ethical being.

Certainly, guilds were sometimes founded with sinister intentions. Without question, the social capital which accrued to members was at times appropriated to serve selfish and destructive interests. It has not been a purpose of this book to idealize the guilds as institutions, or their members as human beings. Nor has the argument ignored their ideological construction and the limitations this imposed on participants. What has emerged from the evidence, however, is the adaptive creativity and critical force of the late-medieval guilds in response to the changing contemporary pressures of personal and collective life. A review of the ethical language of fraternity records has underlined its challenging content. Each set of guild statutes expressed a critical perspective on prevailing social values, and every oath sworn at entry by a new brother or sister was a declaration of a desire to live life differently. The communal, devotional, and charitable works of the members of a guild were understood not as the outward badges of piety but as practical techniques by which to absorb and so to come to embody the society's ideals. The friendships that were deliberately cultivated in the guilds were not conceived as opportunistic means to advance materialistic self-interest. The benefits, both this-worldly and spiritual, which redounded from these relationships to the individual guild member were understood, rather, to derive from their origin in a selfless willingness to care for others for their own sake. The moral economy of the fraternities has been shown to have been a valuable resource in the creation of

trust, without which social bonds could not exist. But even more than this, it embodied a vision of human society in which the individual, by lowering the defences which segregated one from another and by blurring the boundary of the self, could find personal fulfilment through participation in the collective purpose of humanity.

Before turning to others, participants cared first for their own sisters and brothers. But it was precisely by the ways in which they practised treating one another in the guild, crafting the art of solidarity, that members internalized its principles, making of these not an externally imposed code but the very form of life. The public engagement of the fraternity in the larger fields of social welfare and the construction of civic identity further disseminated its values in the wider context. Those values were epitomized in the idea of charity, which called for a decentring of the self, as the lone and isolated person turned outwards to his or her neighbour. With that gesture, the individual was redeemed in the acknowledgement of the shared burden of community.

Select Bibliography

- Bainbridge, Virginia, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside: Social and Religious Change in Cambridgeshire, c.1350–1558* (Woodbridge, 1996).
- Barron, Caroline M., 'The parish fraternities of medieval London', in C. M. Barron and C. Harper-Bill, eds, *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society* (Woodbridge, 1985), 13–37.
- Black, Antony, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London, 1984); reissued as *Guild and State: European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (New Brunswick, NJ, and London, 2003).
- Black, Christopher, and Gravestock, Pamela, eds, *Early Modern Confraternities in Europe and the Americas: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Aldershot, 2006).
- Bossy, John, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985).
- Coornaert, Émile, 'Les gildes médiévales (Ve–XIVe siècles). Définition. Évolution', *Revue historique*, 199 (1948), 22–55, 208–43.
- Crouch, David J. F., *Piety, Fraternity and Power: Religious Gilds in Late Medieval Yorkshire, 1389–1547* (Woodbridge, 2000).
- Derrida, Jacques, *Politics of Friendship*, transl. George Collins (London, 1997).
- Duffy, Eamon, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven and London, 1992).
- Duparc, Pierre, 'Confréries du Saint-Esprit et communautés d'habitants au moyen-âge', *Revue historique de droit français et étranger*, 4th series, 36 (1958), 349–67.
- Escher-Apsner, Monika, "Confraternitas pauperum" / "Confraternitas exulum": Inklusions- und Exklusionsmodi bruderschaftlicher Organisationen—die sog. Elen-denbruderschaften als Sonderform', in Lutz Raphael and Herbert Uerlings, eds, *Zwischen Ausschluss und Solidarität: Modi der Inklusion/Exklusion von Fremden und Armen in Europa seit der Spätantike* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008), 181–212.
- Escher-Apsner, Monika, ed., *Mittelalterliche Bruderschaften in europäischen Städten. Funktionen, Formen, Akteure* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009).
- Esposito, Roberto, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, transl. Timothy Campbell (Stanford, Calif., 2010).
- Esposito, Roberto, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, transl. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge, 2011).
- Farnhill, Ken, *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia, c.1470–1550* (Woodbridge, 2001).
- Frank, Thomas, *Bruderschaften im spätmittelalterlichen Kirchenstadt. Viterbo, Orvieto, Assisi* (Tübingen, 2002).
- Gadd, Ian A., and Wallis, Patrick, eds, *Guilds and Association in Europe, 900–1900* (London, 2006).
- Gerchow, Jan, 'Gilds and fourteenth-century bureaucracy: the case of 1388–9', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 40 (1996), 109–48.

- Gerchow, Jan, 'Memoria als Norm: Aspekte englischer Gildenstatuten des 14. Jahrhunderts', in Dieter Geuenich and Otto Gerhard Oexle, eds, *Memoria in der Gesellschaft des Mittelalters* (Göttingen, 1994), 207–66.
- Geremek, Bronisław, 'Les migrations des compagnons au bas Moyen Âge', *Studia historiae oeconomicae*, 5 (1970), 61–79.
- Giles, Kate, *An Archaeology of Social Identity: Guildhalls in York, c.1350–1630* (Oxford, 2000).
- Giles, Kate, 'English guildhalls', in Martin Carver and Jan Klápště, eds, *The Archaeology of Medieval Europe*, 2 vols (Aarhus, 2011), i. 396–9.
- Giles, Kate, '"A table of alabaster with the story of the Doom": the religious objects and spaces of the guild of Our Blessed Virgin, Boston (Lincs)', in Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, eds, *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham, 2010), 267–85.
- Hammer, Carl I., 'The town–gown confraternity of St. Thomas the Martyr in Oxford', *Mediaeval Studies*, 39 (1977), 466–76.
- Haverkamp, Alfred, 'Leben in Gemeinschaften: alte und neue Formen im 12. Jahrhundert', repr. in F. Burgard, L. Clemens, and M. Matheus, eds, *Gemeinden, Gemeinschaften und Kommunikationsformen im hohen und späten Mittelalter* (Trier, 2002), 207–36.
- Johanek, Peter, ed., *Einungen und Bruderschaften in der spätmittelalterlichen Stadt* (Cologne, 1993).
- Keene, Derek, 'English urban guilds, c.900–1300: the purposes and politics of association', in Gadd and Wallis, eds, *Guilds and Association*, 3–26.
- Keene, Derek, 'Tanners' widows, 1300–1350', in Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton, eds, *Medieval London Widows 1300–1500* (London, 1994), 1–27.
- Kempshall, Matthew, *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, 1999).
- Kowaleski, Marianne, and Bennett, Judith M., 'Crafts, gilds, and women in the Middle Ages: fifty years after Marian K. Dale', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14 (1989), 474–88.
- Le Bras, Gabriel, 'Les confréries chrétiennes' [1941], repr. in his *Études de sociologie religieuse*, ii (Paris, 1956), 423–62.
- Liddy, Christian, 'Urban politics and material culture at the end of the Middle Ages: the Coventry tapestry in St Mary's Hall', *Urban History*, 39 (2012), 203–24.
- McRee, Ben R., 'Charity and gild solidarity in late medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, 32 (1993), 195–225.
- McRee, Ben R., 'Religious gilds and civic order: the case of Norwich in the late Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 67 (1992), 69–97.
- McRee, Ben R., 'Religious gilds and regulation of behaviour in late medieval towns', in Joel Rosenthal and Colin Richmond, eds, *People, Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages* (Gloucester, 1987), 108–22.
- Mahmood, Saba, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, 2005).
- Meersseman, G. G., *Ordo fraternitatis. Confraternite e pietà dei laici nel medioevo* (Rome, 1977).

- Michaud-Quantin, Pierre, *Universitas: expressions du mouvement communautaire dans le moyen-âge latin* (Paris, 1970).
- Oexle, Otto Gerhard, 'Conjuratio et gilde dans l'antiquité et dans le haut moyen âge. Remarques sur la continuité des formes de la vie sociale', *Francia*, 10 (1982), 1–19.
- Oexle, Otto Gerhard, 'Die mittelalterliche Zunft als Forschungsproblem', *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, 118 (1982), 1–44.
- Oexle, Otto Gerhard, 'Gilden als soziale Gruppen in der Karolingerzeit', in H. Jankuhn, W. Janssen, R. Schmidt-Wiegand, and H. Tiefenbach, eds, *Das Handwerk in vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Zeit*, i (Göttingen, 1981), 284–354.
- Oexle, Otto Gerhard, 'Les groupes sociaux du moyen âge et les débuts de la sociologie contemporaine', *Annales—Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* (1992), 751–65.
- Ogilvie, Sheilagh, *Can We Rehabilitate the Guilds? A Sceptical Reappraisal* (Cambridge, 2007).
- Ogilvie, Sheilagh, *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000–1800* (Cambridge, 2011).
- Plessner, Helmuth, *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism*, transl. Andrew Wallace (New York, 1999).
- Putnam, Robert D., *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, 2000).
- Rosser, Gervase, 'The Anglo-Saxon guilds', in John Blair, ed., *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition 950–1200* (Oxford, 1988), 31–4.
- Rosser, Gervase, 'Big Brotherhood: guilds in urban politics in late medieval England', in Gadd and Wallis, eds, *Guilds and Association*, 27–42.
- Rosser, Gervase, 'Communities of parish and guild in the late Middle Ages', in Susan Wright, ed., *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350–1750* (London, 1988), 29–55.
- Rosser, Gervase, 'Crafts, guilds and the negotiation of work in the medieval town', *Past and Present* 154 (1997), 3–31.
- Rosser, Gervase, 'Finding oneself in a medieval fraternity: individual and collective identities in the English guilds', in Monika Escher-Apsner, ed., *Medieval Confraternities in European Towns* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), 255–91.
- Rosser, Gervase, 'Guilds and confraternities: architects of unnatural community', in Élodie Lecuppre-Desjardin and Anne-Laure van Bruaene, eds, *De Bono Communi: The Discourse and Practice of the Common Good in the European City (13th–16th c.)* (Turnhout, 2010), 29–46.
- Rosser, Gervase, *Medieval Westminster 1200–1540* (Oxford, 1989).
- Rosser, Gervase, 'Parochial conformity and voluntary religion in late-medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 1 (1991), 173–89.
- Rosser, Gervase, 'Party list: making friends in the medieval English guilds', in Matthew Davies and Andrew Prescott, eds, *London and the Kingdom: Essays in Honour of Caroline M. Barron* (Donington, 2008), 118–34.
- Rosser, Gervase, 'Roles in life: the drama of the medieval guilds', in Audrey Douglas and Sally-Beth MacLean, eds, *REED in Review: Essays in Celebration of the First Twenty-Five Years* (Toronto, 2006), 140–56.
- Rosser, Gervase, 'Solidarités et changement social: les fraternités urbaines anglaises à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Annales—Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 48 (1993), 1127–43.

- Rosser, Gervase, 'The town and guild of Lichfield in the late Middle Ages', *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 27 (1987 for 1985–6), 39–47.
- Rosser, Gervase, 'Workers' associations in English medieval towns', in Jean-Pierre Sosson, ed., *Les métiers au Moyen Âge* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1994), 283–305.
- Schweinköper, B., ed., *Gilden und Zünfte. Kaufmännische und gewerbliche Genossenschaften im frühen und hohen Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen, 1985).
- Sosson, Jean-Pierre, 'Die Körperschaften in den Niederlanden und Nordfrankreich: neue Forschungsperspektiven', in K. Friedland, ed., *Gilde und Korporationen in den nordeuropäischen Städten des späten Mittelalters* (Cologne, 1984), 79–90.
- Sosson, Jean-Pierre, 'Les métiers: norme et réalité: l'exemple des anciens Pays-Bas méridionaux aux XIVe et XVe siècles', in J. Hamesse and C. Muraille, eds, *Le Travail au Moyen Âge* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1990), 339–48.
- Sosson, Jean-Pierre, *Les Travaux publics de la ville de Bruges, XIVe–XVe siècles* (Brussels, 1977).
- Sutton, Anne, 'The silent years of London guild history before 1300: the case of the mercers', *Historical Research*, 71 (1998), 121–41.
- Swanson, Heather, 'The illusion of economic structure: craft guilds in late medieval English towns', *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), 29–48.
- Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989).
- Toulmin Smith, Joshua, and Toulmin Smith, Lucy, eds, *English Gilds*, Early English Text Society, original series, 40 (1870).
- Veale, Elspeth, 'Craftsmen in the economy of London in the fourteenth century' [1969], repr. in Richard Holt and Gervase Rosser, eds, *The English Medieval Town* (London, 1990), 120–40.
- Veale, Elspeth, 'The "Great Twelve": Mystery and fraternity in thirteenth-century London', *Historical Research*, 64 (1991), 237–63.
- Vincent, Catherine, *Des charités bien ordonnées. Les confréries normandes de la fin du XIIIe siècle au début du XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1988).
- Vincent, Catherine, 'L'apport des confréries à la pratique du droit dans la société urbaine, à partir d'exemples français et italiens des XIII–XVe siècles', in Pierre Monnet and Otto Gerhard Oexle, eds, *Stadt und Recht im Mittelalter. La ville et le droit au Moyen Âge* (Göttingen, 2003), 97–115.
- Westlake, H. F., *The Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England* (London, 1919).
- Wilda, Wilhelm, *Das Gildenwesen im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1831).
- Zardin, Danilo, ed., *Corpi, 'fraternità', mestieri nella storia della società europea* (Rome, 1998).

Index

Entries in *italics* refer to illustrations.

- Abbotsbury 143
- Abelard, Peter 40
- Abingdon:
 - guild of Holy Cross 84, 194–203
 - bridge 186, 199–202
- Acle 137
- Aelred of Rievaulx 100–1, 107
- Albertus Magnus 42, 101–2, 106
- Alcuin of York 45–6
- almshouses 81–2, 84–5, 198, 213
- Althoff, Gerd 100
- Anglo-Saxon guilds 45–6, 67–8
- anti-fraternal sentiment 52–4, 64–5
- Aquinas, Thomas 42–3, 93, 101–2, 106, 108, 188–9
- arbitration 67–71, 107–8, 143–4, 175
- Arendt, Hannah 2
- Aristotle 3, 28, 43, 93–4, 104
 - Ethics* 40–2, 90 n., 91, 98–9, 101–2, 114
 - Politics* 42, 189
- Arras 174
- Aston Cantlow 115
- Augustine, St 37, 54, 93–5, 99, 102, 189, 215–16
- Averroes 188
- Avignon Council, 1326 52

- banners 75, 126–7, 141, 222–3
- Barker, Ernest 26
- Baston 67
- Below, Georg von 8
- Bergamo 39
- Berthold of Regensburg 190
- Beverley 56 n., 77, 128–9, 209
- ‘Big Society’, the 12–13
- Birmingham 209 n.
- Bishop’s Lynn, *see* King’s Lynn
- Black, Antony 14–15
- Blickle, Peter 10
- Bodin, Jean 11–12
- Bologna 68
- Bossy, John 16
- Boston, guild of St Mary 84, 113 n., 126, 127, 129–30, 132, 136, 204, 224
- Brentano, Lujo 20
- Brentford 76
- bridges 86, 186, 199–202
- Bristol 74, 172
- Bruges 165, 169, 182
- burial 80–1, 86, 171, 196, 214, 217–23
- Bury St Edmunds 67, 74–5, 129, 196

- Cambridge 58, 67, 69, 83, 88, 107, 136, 223
- candles 127, 134, 178
- Cavalcanti, Guido 95
- charity 78–86, 122, 124, 190, 199, 213, 216, 220
- Chester 130–1, 176
- Chesterton 223 n.
- Cicero 89, 90 n., 104, 117, 189
- Cirencester 195
- civil society 14–15, 19, 212
- clergy in the guilds 45, 64, 71–2, 132
- Cole, G. D. H. 25
- Cordes 163
- Cortona 127
- Cotttenham 223
- Coventry 104, 127, 133, 134–6, 142, 157, 178, 180–1
- crafts 4, 151–5, 161–84
- credit 155–9
- Creting 158

- Dante Alighieri 40, 95–6, 187–9, 216
- dead, commemoration of 73, 124, 131–2, 134, 179, 213–25
- Derrida, Jacques 91
- Diss 51
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor 54
- Douai 182
- drinking 46, 119–20
 - drinking-horns 88, 135–6
- Dunstable 214
- Durkheim, Émile 150–1

- Elias, Norbert 34
- Ely 56 n.
- emotions 2, 92–7, 108
- Esposito, Roberto 29–30, 62, 191
- eulogia*, *see* holy bread
- Exeter 47

- family, the 6, 58–60, 62, 109–11, 114, 150
- Fanjeaux 86

- feasts 118, 133–40, 197
 Ferguson, Adam 19
 Figgis, John Neville 25
 flagellant guilds 50, 111
 Florence 5, 50–1, 57, 71, 76, 83, 110, 161,
 164–5, 169–70, 182, 212
 Foucault, Michel 32, 61
 France 5, 6, 50, 82, 86, 124, 205
 chambres de rhétorique 129
 Francis, St 38, 42, 60
 Frankfurt 163
 Freiburg 163, 182
- Gedney 86
 Germany 5
 Gierke, Otto von 8–9, 24
 Girolami, Remigio de' 43, 102
 Goffman, Erving 29
 Golyton 106 n.
 Good Samaritan, parable of the 54, 60, 77
 Grantham 97, 132, 135, 139
 Great Yarborough 113
 Great Yarmouth 75, 223
 guildhalls 46, 134–5, 148, 197, 204, 207
- Hadleigh 158
 Heacham 57
 Herder, Johann Gottfried 1–2
 Hilton, Walter 104
 Hincmar of Reims 124–5
 Hobbes, Thomas 3, 17–18, 100
 holy bread 123–5
 hospitals, *see* almshouses
 Hull 70 n., 107, 157
- images 49, 74, 77, 109, 127, 132, 164–5, 196–9
 indulgences 113 n.
 Ingham 66, 127
 Ipswich 128
- Kidderminster 49
 King's Lynn 68–70, 77, 82–3, 85, 107, 112,
 115, 127, 132, 136, 140 n., 143–4, 158
- Lamprecht, Karl 24
 Lancaster 68
 Langport 86
 Lawshall 127
 Leicester 49, 55, 107
 Lichfield, guild of St Mary and St John the
 Baptist 68, 71–2, 115–16, 205–7
 Limoges 67
 Lincoln 57, 59, 116–17, 127, 139
 livery 66, 125, 135, 144–5
 Locke, John 18
- London 55, 68–9, 84, 91, 104–5, 162, 166–8,
 170, 172–80, 183
 guild of Corpus Christi in St Mildred
 Poultry 163
 guild of the Holy Blood of Wilsnak in the
 Austin Friars 106
 guild of the Holy Cross 108
 guild of Jesus in St Paul's 75
 guild of Our Lady's Light in St Stephen
 Coleman Street 66
 guild of St Anne in St Lawrence Jewry 55,
 84, 106–7
 guild of St Augustine by Paul's Gate 68,
 140 n.
 guild of St Catherine in St Botolph
 Aldersgate 108, 157
 guild of St Fabian and St Sebastian in
 St Botolph Aldersgate 66–7, 73, 110
 guild of St James in St James
 Garlickhithe 89
 guild of St John the Baptist of the
 Tailors 144, 181
 guild of St Mary in All Hallows London
 Wall 175
 guild of St Peter in St Peter's Cornhill 73
 guild of 'the penny brethren' in St Lawrence
 Jewry 176
 society of the Puy 129–30
 Louth 74, 126, 130
 'love brethren' 144–5, 181
 Lübeck 83
 Ludlow, John Malcolm 21
 Ludlow, palmer's guild 82, 113 n., 118, 133,
 144–5, 223
 Luton, guild of Holy Trinity *xiv*, 110, 126,
 141–2, 224–5
- Macfarlane, Alan 13–14, 149–50
 Mahmood, Saba 32–4, 61–2
 Maidstone 145, 204
 Maitland, Frederic William 20, 24–5
 Marx, Karl 21
 mass, the 47, 72–3, 123, 131–3, 139–40,
 218–19
 mendicant orders 39, 62, 179
 Milan 47, 126
 monasticism 38–9, 47, 85, 98, 138, 218;
 see also mendicant orders
 music 67, 74–5, 129–30, 134–5, 197
 mysticism 16, 34–5
- Newcastle-upon-Tyne 104–5
 Northampton 49
 Norwich 56, 74, 163 n., 167, 222 n., 225
 Nottingham 140, 175

- oaths 46, 52, 58, 108, 162–3, 183
 Oexle, Otto Gerhard 9
 Outwell 68
 Oxborough 139 n.
 Oxford 65, 144, 157, 195
- Paris 156, 162, 167, 169, 177, 181
 parish, the 4, 48–9, 220
 Peace of God movement 67
 Plato, *Republic* 1
 plays 53, 74, 77, 122, 128–31, 208–9, 217–18
 Plessner, Helmuth 26–8
 pluralists 24–6
 poor, the 81, 160
 guilds of 56, 83
 recipients of guild charity 83–6, 137–9,
 157–8, 198, 220
 prayer 73–6, 223–5
 processions 75, 77, 86, 104–5, 122, 125–9,
 197, 208
 purgatory 6, 131–2, 202–3, 214–21
 Putnam, Robert 11–12, 192
- Reform, the Catholic 6, 15–16, 45, 113, 125
 Reformation, the Protestant 6, 15–16, 202,
 218, 220–1
 relics 132, 177, 208
 Ripon 51
 Rolle, Richard 76–7, 95
 Rottweil 177
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 1–2, 18
- Saffron Walden 210
 Salisbury 85, 224
 Sandwich 57 n.
 Scheler, Max 2
 Schlettstadt 177
 schools 20, 204–5, 209–10, 213
 sermons 68, 75, 77, 190
 Sleaford 128–9
 Smith, Adam 18, 21
 Socrates 1
 Spalding 132
 state, the 2–5, 11–18, 21–2, 52, 211–13
- Stow, John 91
 Strasbourg 169–170
 Stratford-upon-Avon, guild of the Holy
 Cross 36, 49, 56, 72, 77, 80–1, 110, 112,
 114–15, 126 n., 140–1, 145, 204–5, 210
 Swaffham 110–12, 158
- Taylor, Charles 27 n., 31, 89–90
 Thetford 49
 Tocqueville, Alexis de 11–12
 Tönnies, Ferdinand 23, 25
 Toulmin Smith, Joshua 22
 Toulouse 47
 Tournai 165
 Troyes 163
- Upwell 70 n., 77
- Vauchez, André 16
 Venice 171, 173, 176, 182
- Wakefield 209
 Warwick 165
 Watlington 144
 Weber, Max 23, 59, 87
 Westminster:
 guild of the Assumption 66, 69–70, 84,
 114, 135
 guild of St Mary Rounceval 68 n., 77 n.,
 81–2
 Whaplode 120 n.
 Wiggenshall 138
 Wilda, Wilhelm 8, 19, 59
 Winchester 119
 Wisbech 51, 68, 70 n., 134, 138, 210
 women in guilds 4, 56, 110–12, 175–6, 181–2
 Wymondham 83, 126, 141, 220
- York 59, 85, 130–1, 148
 guild of Corpus Christi 75, 136, 207–8
 guild of Paternoster 74, 78, 106
 guild of St Augustine 178
 guild of St John the Baptist 106
 youth in guilds 50–1, 77–8, 110, 112–13